

Assessment of Students in Department of Juvenile Justice Programs

RATIONALE

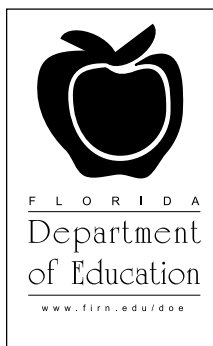
The 1999 Florida Legislature revised the laws pertaining to the assessment of students in Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) facilities. These laws identify specific assessment requirements designed to measure student academic progress and to guide the instructional process during placement in detention and commitment facilities. Section 228.081(2)(e) F.S., requires the Florida Department of Education (DOE) to

- promulgate a rule that articulates policies and standards for academic and vocational assessments administered at program entry and exit,
- design assessment for students in detention who will move on to commitment facilities that will create the foundation for developing the student’s educational program in the commitment facility, and
- require that the assessments of students sent directly to commitment facilities are completed within the first week of commitment.

Furthermore, the law requires that the results of these assessments must be included in the student’s discharge package, together with a portfolio depicting the student’s academic and vocational accomplishments. Finally, revisions to s. 228.081 F.S., require the DOE and DJJ, school districts, and providers to develop standardized content of education records to include, “but not be limited to, the following:

1. A copy of the student’s individualized education plan
2. Assessment data, including grade level proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics, and performance on tests taken according to s. 229.57;
3. A copy of the student’s permanent cumulative record;
4. A copy of the student’s academic transcript; and
5. A portfolio reflecting the youth’s academic accomplishments while in the Department of Juvenile Justice program.”

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PAPERS are produced periodically by the Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services to present discussion of current topics. The TA Papers may be used for inservice sessions, technical assistance visits, parent organization meetings, or interdisciplinary discussion groups. Topics are identified by state steering committees, district personnel, and individuals, or from program compliance monitoring.

One additional requirement was spelled out in legislation regarding statewide student assessments. Specifically, s. 229.57 F.S., was amended to require the DOE to develop, select, and implement a common battery of assessment tools to be used in all DJJ programs. This common battery must accurately reflect the Sunshine State Standards.

As previously noted, the DOE, in cooperation with the DJJ, was charged with promulgating a rule to implement these legislative mandates regarding assessment of students assigned to DJJ facilities. Rule 6A-6.05281, FAC was adopted on April 16, 2000.

This technical assistance paper (TAP) is written to assist school district and DJJ personnel in implementing the requirements for assessment contained within the revised statute and rule. In order to facilitate this process, a number of key concepts and principles related to assessment are provided. Information is also included that will strengthen the link between assessment, instruction, and academic progress for students in DJJ facilities.

BEST PRACTICES IN ASSESSMENT

1. What is meant by the term “assessment?”

Assessment is defined as “the process of collecting data for the purpose of specifying and verifying problems and making decisions about students” (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1991, p. 3). Assessment also identifies specific strengths of students, information that can be valuable for planning a student’s educational program.

2. What methods are used to gather assessment information?

Depending on the actual decision that needs to be made, different types of data are obtained using different methods of assessment. Typically, assessment methods have been organized into the following broad approaches: review of records, interviews, observations, and tests (the acronym used is RIOT). Tests involve measurement methods that are further distinguished as norm-referenced or criterion-referenced.

Norm-referenced tests (NRTs) are designed to determine student performance relative to peers of the same age or grade level. Criterion-referenced tests (CRTs) are designed to identify an individual’s status with respect to an established standard (criterion) of performance. CRTs help to prioritize subskills needing remediation and to compare skills over time. Most of these tests are commercially produced and do not reflect skills from any one specific curriculum but provide a broad representation of many curricula. Often these tests cover more than one subject area and measure skills across a large range of grade levels. They are not typically designed for retesting within brief periods of time because each skill is measured by only a few test items.

These two methods of assessment provide either direct or indirect measures of actual skills being taught in the classroom (Shapiro, 1989, 1996). Direct measures, whether norm-referenced or criterion-referenced, are those that assess skills using methods and items that are drawn directly from classroom instructional materials. Indirect measures are not necessarily reflective of the curriculum and instruction that the student is receiving. Most commercially-prepared tests are indirect measures of student performance.

3. How does “assessment” differ from the term “testing?”

As already noted, testing is but one aspect of assessment. In order to maximize information about a student, it is important that information (both structured and informal) is obtained from more than one informant (parent, teacher, the student) in more than one setting (classroom, residence or home, social setting) using multiple techniques (record review, observation, interview, test). This is often referred to as the multi-method, multi-setting, and multi-source assessment process.

4. What types of scores/reports are typically obtained from assessment activities?

Scores or reports obtained from assessments will depend on the type of assessment activity that is being reported. With record reviews and interviews, descriptive information is provided that summarizes the results of the assessment activities. Information from observations may be provided in an anecdotal format or a behavior-rating format (i.e., ratings of behavior frequency, duration, and/or intensity). Tests provide several types of scoring formats. Norm-referenced tests yield scores on a standard scale that reflect a student’s performance as compared to the performance of other students at the same grade or age level. Criterion-referenced tests are usually scored on a pass/fail or a “level” basis, such as on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) CRT scores are used to reflect whether or not the student has passed enough items to be considered meeting the criterion for accomplishment of the skill being measured.

5. What is the purpose of assessment?

The purpose of assessment is to make appropriate educational decisions. These decisions fall into four categories: Classroom-based decisions, entitlement decisions, instructional decisions, and accountability/outcome decisions.

- 1) Classroom-based decisions include those initial decisions that a teacher might make about providing special instruction, assistance, or enrichment to a student. In DJJ programs, this would include the entry-level assessments undertaken when a student first enters the program.
- 2) Entitlement decisions are those that are made by individuals besides the classroom teacher such as school psychologists, counselors, special education placement specialists, and administrators. They include screening and referral decisions, determining exceptionality or special learning needs, and determining eligibility for services.
- 3) The third category of assessment activities targets instructional decisions and includes instructional planning decisions, determining the setting where instruction should take place, and progress evaluation decisions. The classroom teacher or an educational diagnostician may conduct these assessments.
- 4) Finally, accountability/outcome decisions focus on program evaluation and accountability determinations regarding student progress. The DJJ program exit assessments may be used to make these decisions.

6. What types of assessments are best suited to these four types of educational decisions?

Classroom based decisions usually rely on brief measures that provide a gauge of a student’s skill development. These may be norm-referenced or criterion referenced measures, but they should be closely aligned with the classroom curriculum. These measures also are helpful if they can provide information for helping the teacher set short- and long-term academic goals.

Entitlement decisions rely primarily on norm-referenced measures because program eligibility is usually based on the discrepancy between the referred student's performance and that of students who are performing as expected on the particular skill. Tests used to determine a student's eligibility for many of the exceptional education programs fall into this category. However, in some circumstances, the tests used to determine eligibility may be based on medical evaluations indicating that a student's physical condition falls outside the norm of a specific medical standard.

Instructional decisions are generally made using information gained from criterion-referenced measures. These measures are helpful in prioritizing skills for instruction as well as determining the sequence for skill-building activities.

Finally, accountability decisions are typically made using the same techniques that were used in the classroom-based decision part of the process. This might be referred to as the posttest or progress-monitoring period where growth in skills is being assessed following a particular series of instructional activities or participation in an intervention program.

The more comprehensive an evaluation that is needed, the more beneficial it is to increase the number of assessments that are conducted. It is extremely important to match the type of assessment with the decision that is to be made, or stated differently, the type of question that needs to be answered.

7. Are some tests or assessment procedures better than others are?

All tests that are commercially or teacher developed will have varying strengths and weaknesses. Professionals who select tests for individual or wide-scale administration should have a foundation in tests and measurement. This provides assurance that issues regarding test bias, reliability, and validity have been considered and deemed adequate for the purposes for which the test will be used. Priority should be given to tests that have current standardization information. Achievement tests with publication dates more than 10 years ago should be used with caution as norms have a tendency to change over time.

8. What skills/competencies are needed to conduct student academic and vocational assessments required in DJJ programs, and how might they be acquired?

Individuals conducting academic and vocational assessments should be trained and skilled in the particular assessment procedure being used. This training may be acquired through formal, college-level classes, training and mentoring from a skilled assessment specialist or self-study with competency documentation by a trainer/mentor. A trainer/mentor is a qualified examiner who is already skilled and experienced in assessment techniques and who can provide individual assistance to others in acquiring these skills. Besides skill in conducting a particular assessment method or using a particular test, qualified examiners should be knowledgeable about any test or method of assessment they are using, the strengths and limitations of the test, and how test results are interpreted for educational decisions. Foundation courses or training in basic tests and measurement is one way that these competencies can be acquired.

Circumstances may require that teachers and other educators be trained only in the administration of individual tests, with this test administration conducted under the supervision of a qualified examiner. The interpretation of the results of these tests, however, should be the responsibility of the qualified examiner.

9. Who are the most appropriate persons in a DJJ facility to conduct student academic and vocational assessments?

Commercially published tests usually describe the type of training or expertise that an individual must have to conduct specific tests. Therefore, each test manual should be reviewed for this recommendation. In general, an educational diagnostician or student services professional is often qualified to conduct a broad range of student assessments. However, many of the smaller DJJ programs do not have these personnel on staff. In such cases, teachers with special education training are often a valuable resource for these assessments.

It is important to recognize that general education classroom teachers conduct a variety of assessments on a daily basis, and specialized skills in specific assessment methods may be added with a minimum of training. Needless to say, no one individual may hold all the knowledge and competencies to conduct the varied types of assessments that may be needed to evaluate and determine instructional programs for all students in DJJ programs. Resources at each center should be identified along with needs for additional training to develop a strong individual student assessment program. When necessary, the local school district or other community resources for academic and vocational assessment should be contacted for assistance in meeting the training needs of DJJ program personnel.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN DJJ PROGRAMS

10. What are the required assessments that must be conducted in DJJ facilities?

Students in DJJ facilities are required to participate in all aspects of the statewide assessment program. These requirements are outlined in sections 229.57, 232.245, 232.246 and 232.247 F.S. In addition, those students who wish to participate in the Adult General Education Program (GED) or the Postsecondary Vocational Certificate Education Program must comply with the relevant assessment requirements as outlined in the State Board of Education Rules 6A-6.014, FAC, and 6A-10.040, FAC. Finally, assessment procedures for students with disabilities must be conducted as specified in Rules 6A-6.03011 – 6A-6.03411, FAC and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Students in DJJ programs also must participate in academic assessments at program entry and exit and vocational assessments at program entry. Academic assessments must be completed in reading, writing, and mathematics. Those students moving from detention to commitment facilities must have an assessment that provides the foundation for developing the student's educational program in the commitment facility. Finally, the student's grade level proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics must be included in their commitment record.

11. When must the program entry and exit assessments be administered?

Rule 6A-6.05281(3)(b), FAC, states that students in DJJ commitment, day treatment or early delinquency intervention programs who have not graduated from school must have the program entry assessments conducted within the first seven (7) days of commitment. The rule does not provide a timeline for program entry assessments for students in detention programs, but a standard consistent with that of commitment programs (i.e., within the first week) is recommended. Program exit assessments should be provided prior to the student's transition from the commitment, day treatment, or early delinquency intervention program. Exit assessments are not required for detention centers.

12. Is an exit assessment required for students reassigned or being considered for reassignment to another DJJ program after only a brief period (e.g. two weeks)?

Yes. The only exception made to the exit assessment is for students in detention centers [Rule 6A-6.05281(3)(d), FAC].

13. What types of tests work well for the program entry and exit assessments?

The intent of the program entry and exit assessments is to provide a measure of student progress during his/her participation in DJJ programs. Therefore, assessment procedures that are designed to measure change over short and long periods of time should be selected to meet this purpose. The procedures also should be amenable to repeated testing within short periods of time to accommodate the varying lengths of time that students participate in DJJ programs. They also should be sensitive to small changes in skill development. Finally, in order to utilize these student assessments for program evaluation, the scores obtained should provide a measure of student progress across multiple age and grade levels that can be combined to represent group progress.

Curriculum-based measurement (CBM) procedures are currently being piloted in selected DJJ sites to determine if they are an appropriate method for accomplishing these multiple goals for entry and exit assessments. Currently, programs are utilizing a broad range of tests and measures for obtaining this information, and it is the intent of this pilot project to formulate a common battery of assessment tools to be used in all DJJ programs as the entry and exit assessments. Once the pilot study is completed, the DOE will provide programs with a listing of measures that will be given preference for assessing student academic progress. A guide, entitled *Accountability: A practical guide to assessments for evaluating student performance*, developed by the Florida Charter School Resource Center lists commonly used instruments in educational settings. It is available on request from The Florida Charter School Resource Center at 813/974-3700, Suncom 574-3700, Fax 813/974-5132. The DOE is also preparing a test resource manual that will provide information on the more common assessment instruments used or recommended for DJJ educational programs.

14. When must the vocational assessment be administered?

Vocational assessments are part of the program entry requirements for all DJJ students except those students assigned to detention centers and not transferring to a commitment program. Rule 6A-6.05281(3)(b)2, FAC, requires the administration of vocational assessments within the first seven (7) days of program attendance.

15. What types of tests work well for vocational assessments?

A specific vocational assessment procedure has not been mandated. Programs may select a skill-based (aptitude) or interest-based assessment depending on what will provide the most valuable information for developing the student's instructional program. Many programs select vocational interest measures for the program entry assessment in contrast to the more extensive vocational skills measures that depend on observations of the student over an extended period of time. These more in-depth measures may be advantageous in gathering information about the student as they progress through the vocational skill portion of their program and to assist in transitioning decisions. An example of a skills-based measure is curriculum-based vocational assessments (CBVA). Materials for conducting CBVA are available from the Florida Department of Education by contacting the Division of Workforce Development (850/488-0186) or the Clearinghouse Information Center (850/488-1878) and asking for document DD035, Curriculum-Based Vocational Assessment in Florida.

16. When assessing students with disabilities who are protected under the Individuals with Education Act of 1997 (IDEA '97) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, what special considerations should be made?

Programs are responsible for following all of the requirements in these two federal laws, including those requirements pertaining to student assessment, for students identified as disabled or suspected of having a disability. In addition, information obtained from program entry and exit assessments, and vocational assessments should be considered in determining a student's eligibility for special education services, in preparing or modifying a student's individual educational plan (IEP), and in determining his/her educational needs. The Department of Education has issued numerous technical assistance papers related to assessment for students with disabilities, including testing accommodations and modification for students with disabilities. These documents may be obtained from the Clearinghouse Information Center.

17. If a student is emotionally distraught, uncooperative or "Christmas trees" an assessment, what should be done?

Assessment information gained from an uncooperative, emotionally unstable, or unmotivated student is an invalid assessment and should not be scored. A notation should be placed in the student record that assessment was attempted but the results were invalid due to the behavior or condition of the student. A reassessment should be conducted as soon as possible with intervening contact with the student to determine the cause of the interfering behavior. Many times students who have weak academic skills would prefer to not respond, present a "don't care" attitude, or do not appreciate the value that assessment might have for them. Student motivation to perform may be enhanced by providing feedback on the results of the assessment as well as how the information will be used to develop academic goals for the student and to contribute to their eventual transition. Interventions to alleviate emotional factors interfering with assessment performance should be initiated by mental health resources at the facility.

18. What constitutes the portfolio of accomplishments/exit portfolio?

Rule 6A-6.05281(5)(d), FAC, states that the portfolio included in the exit packet created for each student prior to leaving a commitment, day treatment, or early delinquency intervention program includes, at a minimum, the following:

1. Transition plan;
2. Results of district and state-wide assessments;
3. Individual academic plan, 504 plan, and/or individual educational plan for exceptional students;
4. Academic record or transcript; and
5. Work and/or project samples.

19. How should assessment data be recorded in the student's commitment record, discharge packet, and the academic cumulative record?

Rule 6A-6.05281(3)(g), FAC, states that the results of the entry and exit assessments shall be reported in the format prescribed by Rule 6A-1.0014, FAC, to the DOE via the Automated Student Data System. The format for the reporting of the results of these assessments may include grade equivalent scores, percentiles, and/or scaled scores.