

Introduction to Effective Assessment for Students With Special Needs

Eleanor is not allowed to enter school because her performance on a test indicates that she is not yet “ready.” **Heidi** is told to repeat second grade because her performance on a set of tests indicates she has not yet mastered second-grade content. **José** is assigned to a class for students who are gifted, while **Zeke** is placed in a class for students with learning disabilities. These placements were dependent on how the students performed on a set of tests. **Ariel** is admitted to Florida State University, but **Clem** is denied admission because his test scores are too low. **Mark**, an all-city basketball player, cannot attend a Division 1 college because his scores on the SAT are too low, even though his grades are high enough. **Randy** gets a scholarship because of his very high test scores. **Kate** earns a high score on a selection test and gets a position with General Mills; **Esther** does not do well on the test and isn’t offered a position. **Manuel** wants to be a policeman, but the score he earned on the police exam places him 286th in line for hiring. This year, the city expects to hire 21 police officers.

For all of these young people, and others like them, testing can have a major effect on life choices and opportunities. American schools and society place considerable emphasis on

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test results. We estimate that the nation's more than 50 million elementary and secondary students take 150 million separate tests annually as part of the standardized testing mandated by states and school districts. An additional 150 million tests are given to students over and above state or district requirements. American school children take more tests than other children in the world. And, with new federal mandates to test all students in Grades 3 through 8 every year, the numbers will increase.

Testing plays a major role in **assessment**, the process by which teachers and other school personnel collect information to make decisions about students. Historically in special and remedial education, and now increasingly in general education as well, the focus of assessment has been on student progress toward instructional goals and on the extent to which students need special education and related services. In addition to testing, educators gather data by:

Observing students' behaviors

Interviewing students or those who work with them

Reviewing work samples

For students who are exceptional, assessment is especially critical because it helps educators decide whether they should receive special education services, what the specific nature of their instruction should be, and the extent to which they are making educational progress.

In this book, we look at the ways assessment data are used to make decisions about students with disabilities and those who are gifted and talented, the ways in which information is obtained, and the particular type of information collected from various assessment activities. We also discuss standards for conducting assessment and some guidelines for best practice.