

## Sylvan Learning Center

### Assessment Practices in the Sylvan Learning Center

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Assessment is a critical part of all Sylvan Learning Center programs. Centers must adhere to correct assessment practices so that an individualized program can be developed for each child who enrolls in a center. We recognize the following facts based upon over twenty-five years of serving children and families:

- Academic subjects do not exist in isolation. Addressing only one subject area does not uniformly remediate or enrich a student's academic progress. Content areas are interrelated; word problems in mathematics, for example, rely on a student's ability to read.
- Academic challenges are rarely limited to one subject. Families report that while students may be experiencing pronounced difficulty in a particular subject area, more often than not they are also experiencing difficulties in other classes.
- Student motivation and confidence rise with success. As proficiency rises in multiple subjects, students' success in school also rises, from subject to subject.

Serving families well means meeting their needs. To do that best, Sylvan Learning Centers use assessments as a tool for developing the best program for its students. Sylvan Learning Centers follow the accepted educational assessment standards put forth by test publishers, professional organizations, and independent evaluation bodies. While a Sylvan Center is a unique setting, different from both a clinical office and a school, we rightly follow the accepted and respected practices of the educational community.

For guidance in assessment practices, the educational community defers to the universally accepted general sources: *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing and Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education*. Both of these sources were developed in whole, or in part, by the American Psychological Association, the Joint Committee on Testing Practices, the American Educational Research Association and the National Council on Measurement in Education. The Code describes the rights and responsibilities of test users and test developers. The *Standards* delineate 264 educational and psychological practices that should be followed whenever assessments are developed and conducted.

Another source for acceptable testing practices, "Standards for Educational Accountability Systems," has been offered by the National Center for research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing in its publication *Policy Brief*.

Recommendations relevant to Sylvan Learning Centers from each of the three aforementioned sources are as follows:

*Code of Fair Testing Practices*. (1988) Washington, D.C.: Joint Committee of Testing Practices.

- Use other appropriate and reliable sources of information, such as teacher and parental observation, to corroborate test scores.
- Make sure all test administrators are familiar with the way the test was developed and tested.

- Make accommodations for test takers with “handicapping conditions.” [a documented learning disability] (p.4)

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education. *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.

- Standard 5.1: Test administrators should follow carefully the standardized procedures for administration and scoring specified by the test developer, unless the situation or test taker’s disability dictates that an exception should be made.... Judgments of the suitability of adjustments should be tempered by the consideration that departures from standard procedures may jeopardize the validity of the test score interpretation. (p. 63)
- Standard 5.2: Modifications or disruptions of standardized test administration procedures or scoring should be documented. (p. 63)
- Standard 5.4: The testing environment should furnish reasonable comfort with minimal distractions.... Testing sessions should be monitored where appropriate to assist the test taker when a need arises and to maintain proper administration procedures. (p. 63)
- Standard 13.10 Those responsible for educational testing programs should ensure that the individuals who administer and score the test(s) are proficient in the appropriate test administration procedures and scoring procedures and that they understand the importance of adhering to the directions provided by the test developer. (p. 147)

Baker, E.L., Linn, R.L., Herman, J.L. & Koretz, D. (2002). Standards for educational accountability systems. *Policy Brief*, 5. The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, University of California Los Angeles, CA.

- Instructional decisions about a single student should not be made on the basis of one test result.
- Multiple forms of a given test should be used when repeated administrations are required.
- Accommodations may be needed for students with disabilities. Whenever possible, the testing environment should make it possible for students with disabilities to perform to the best of his or her ability without hampering the performance of other students. Documentation of such accommodations should be made.

In addition to these three highly respected sources of standards, Sylvan Learning Center conducts broader research to be certain that all appropriate practices are followed. A meta-analysis of assessment research yields several points that are relevant to the unique setting of a Sylvan Learning Center. Please see *References* that follow for sources.

- Test takers should be permitted to finish an assessment without undue stress. If this stress occurs, the incorrect responses may be the result of factors other than the test takers’ lack of knowledge.
- Two or more tests assessing the same cognitive domain (such as language arts, math, etc.) should be administered consecutively to completely assess the student’s ability in that area.
- The order the subtests are given at the Initial Assessment is the same order they are given in at the Progress Assessment.

- A test taker's motivation can make a great difference in the test scores.
  - At Sylvan, this means we motivate our students, during the assessment, to do the best they can. This is accomplished by giving specific praise and encouragement while participating in Sylvan's Motivation Program.
- Test administrators must deliver tests that are consistent in both environment and procedure to those outlined by test developers.
- Decisions about students' assessments and instruction should be based on research, test results, and observation.
  - Sylvan's assessment administrators make quantitative observations of student behavior during the assessments. Adjustments and observations are documented and shared with parents.
- Test administrators should establish and maintain a rapport with the test takers.
  - Trained and qualified center staff conducts the assessments. They work to build a friendly, non-threatening rapport with children.
- Test administrators must be familiar with the test before giving it. Test users should be qualified to administer the test
  - Each Sylvan employee who administers assessments has completed appropriate training for each assessment.
- The test environment must be conducive for test taking.
  - The testing room is comfortable and free of distractions. A structured environment makes it easier for a child to attend to the testing material.
- The test session must be monitored and accessible to the [center] staff at all times.
- Test administrators have management skills to deal with random, unexpected situations that could arise in the testing environment, such as disruption in testing routine and test-taker questions or misbehavior.
  - Test-takers are never left alone.
- Any deviations from standard procedure, including examinee misbehavior, must be documented.
  - Assessment administrators document any behavior or events that affect the testing environment, such as lethargic student behavior or any interruptions to the testing environment.
- Examinees with documented disabilities have the right to accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Documentation must be provided.
  - Assessment administrators also document when any modifications are made and share these modifications with parents.
- The test administrator informs the test taker of what is being assessed and what to expect from the assessment session.
  - Expected behavior is established with the child before starting the test.
  - Parents are advised that the child needs to be well fed and well rested before taking the assessment.
- The [center] solicits information from the responsible party, either the parent or test taker himself, regarding any disabilities or difficulties that may affect the test results.
- Most states, including large and educationally significant states such as Texas, New York, California, Pennsylvania, Florida, Kentucky and Illinois, conduct assessments over consecutive days with per-day times ranging from two to four hours, depending on the age of the student. Generally, the older the student, the longer he can be expected to sit for an assessment.

- Assessment practices need to be developmentally appropriate. Children below third grade are developing at a rapid rate; assessing them with inappropriate practices can yield questionable results.
  - Test takers, especially children, require breaks between tests, at least ten minutes in length. The Sylvan assessment process provides for these breaks.
- A test can be deemed fair and accurate if the student passes with the same degree of accuracy, or better, as he or she did during work at the instructional table.
  - Adjustments to a child's program are made after the assessment based on valid and reliable assessment results. Assessment results are used as a tool to better serve each child.
- Assessments should be based on students' needs.
  - Assessments are given based upon the expressed need of the family in addition to any presented need of the child during the assessment.

In addition to following standards and research recommendations, Sylvan Learning Centers must adhere to the recommendations of the assessment publishers for each assessment used. Adhering to the assessment developers procedures yield more reliable and valid results. The following recommendations come from our most widely used assessments:

*Gray Oral Reading Test – Third Edition Examiner's Manual*

p. 8: The time required to administer each form of the GORT-3 will vary from approximately 15 to 30 minutes. Although the test is best administered in one session, examiners may use two sessions if the reader becomes fatigued or uncooperative.

*Comprehensive Receptive and Expressive Vocabulary Test Examiner's Manual*

p. 9: No time limits are imposed on this test. The time required to give both subtests varies from 20 to 30 minutes. Receptive Vocabulary and Expressive Vocabulary subtests rarely take more than 10 to 15 minutes each to administer. Stop testing if the subject tires or loses interest. Continue testing another time.

*CAT/5 Test Coordinator's Handbook.*

p. 3-1: To maintain the integrity of the normative information derived from a standardized test, testing conditions should simulate as closely as possible the conditions under which the test was standardized. This means that the specified testing procedures should be followed carefully and that students should not be exposed to the test before the actual testing. Otherwise, results of testing cannot be interpreted with consistency for all students.

p. 3-3: In some special circumstances, the standard testing procedures may need to be modified. To make these decisions, the coordinator needs to have a clear understanding of the limitations and restrictions of the test.

Altering Standard Procedures: Comparisons of test scores are legitimate only when the groups being compared worked under the same conditions. When CAT/5 is used with groups that are exceptional or atypical in some way, as in language or culture, some alteration in the standard administration procedures may be warranted. Any decisions to depart from standard procedures should be made by the test coordinator, and only with the awareness of how the changes might affect interpretation of the test scores. Comparisons with national norms must always be considered in light of such alteration.

Changing Time Limits: Ordinarily almost all students (90% or more) can answer all the questions or tasks they know within the time limits. If all students in the group complete a test section before the specified time has elapsed, the examiner may call time and proceed with the next section. When only a criterion-referenced interpretation of the scores is planned, the test coordinator may wish to consider extending the testing time for students who are not able to complete testing within the time limit.

*[Note: Sylvan Learning Centers use the CAT as a criterion-referenced test. Therefore, it is vital that the test taker is permitted to complete the entire test.]*

p. 3-4: It is usually preferable to schedule testing early in the school day.

*[Note: CTB/McGraw-Hill's CAT norms are based on the best practice of the schools in which the tested the CAT. This meant administering one content area per day.]*

*CAT/5 Examiner's Manual: Complete Battery Level 12, Form A and B*

*CAT/5 Examiner's Manual: Complete Battery Level 13, Form A and B*

*CAT/5 Examiner's Manual: Complete Battery Level 14-21/22, Form A and B*

p. 6: Administer the test, if possible, during the middle of the week. Schedule the testing to allow sufficient time to complete a unit by the end of the testing session.

Schedule breaks so you can maintain an unhurried pace and a relaxed atmosphere. Be sensitive to the fatigue level and attention span of students. Balance your sense of their attention span against your knowledge of the length and difficulty of the various test sessions, and alter your schedule as necessary. Eliminate distractions.

p. 7: Non-valid Tests: A non-valid test results when a student loses time during a test section or marks answers randomly. A loss of time may result from illness or some other unavoidable interruption.

At each Sylvan Learning Center, we work hard to be certain that each child's individual needs are met from the first contact to graduation. This includes the assessment. Sylvan uses the assessment as a tool for developing the best program for each child. Correct assessment use at Sylvan adheres to accepted standards and practices. This allows Sylvan Learning Center to measure its successful service to children and families and to share those results with potential families and educators. Sylvan relies on strict assessment practices to add validity and reliability to its data. Proper implementation of assessment standards is critical to Sylvan's success.

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