

## Introduction

### Purpose

This module has been designed for use by Iowa educators to assist them in making sound decisions regarding activities associated with preparing students to take the *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS)* or *Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED)*. Although these two test batteries have been used in Iowa schools for nearly 70 years, historically the scores have been used for instructional decision-making and have not been tied to high stakes for students or schools. The enactment of NCLB, however, has added school-level accountability to the ways in which the scores from these tests are being used, and it is likely that many educators have been (or will be) inclined to respond to external pressure to increase student scores by engaging students in test-preparation activities. Because some of these activities can result in inaccurate scores and produce negative consequences for students, teachers, schools, parents, and the community, it is important that educators (teachers and administrators) be able to make educationally and ethically defensible decisions about what types of activities can be used and in what contexts.

It's important to clarify that the guidance presented in the module pertains to the use of test preparation in the context of preparing students to take the *Iowa Tests*. Some activities that might be appropriate for helping students to prepare for an assessment in one context (i.e., classroom test, ACT) might not be appropriate in other types of testing situations.

### Using this Module

This professional development program has been designed for use in the following types of situations.

- Independently, self-paced by individual educators
- Small-group settings, with opportunities for discussion

Throughout the module, opportunities for reflection and interaction have been incorporated. It's believed that these opportunities are essential for developing a sound understanding of the complexities associated with preparing students for testing in the context of school-level accountability.

### Objectives

At the completion of this professional development module, educators should be able to:

1. Explain how criteria related to academic ethics, score meaning & use, and educational value are related to test-preparation activities.
2. Explain how the ways in which the *Iowa Tests* are used in the state have bearing on the appropriateness of a given test-preparation activity, in terms of academic ethics and/or score meaning & use.
3. Use criteria related to academic ethics, score meaning & use, and educational value to evaluate the appropriateness of a given test-preparation activity and make recommendations regarding how the activity might be modified, if necessary, to be more appropriate in light of these three criteria.

4. Identify negative consequences for students, teachers, schools, parents, and the community resulting from the use of improper test-preparation activities.
5. Conceptualize a personal philosophy regarding test preparation, which incorporates the three criteria related to academic ethics, score meaning & use, and educational value.

**Components:**

- Part 1 What is “test preparation?”
- Part 2 Why do educators feel that test-preparation activities are necessary and/or important?
- Part 3 Why *should* educators care about the “appropriateness” of test preparation?
- Part 4 How can the appropriateness of a test-preparation activity be determined?
- Part 5 What should educators do when they feel pressured to use inappropriate practices or they are aware of such practices being conducted in their school?
- Part 6 What can/should be done to increase the likelihood that scores are a true representation of what students know and are able to do in the areas covered by the tests?

**Instructional Aids:**

*Print-versions of these materials can be obtained from the “Downloads” page.*

Study Plan: A general outline, which summarizes the organization of this module, has been provided so that you can more easily reflect upon where you are as you progress through the module. This plan also contains estimates of the amount of time required to complete each part of the module.

Flowchart: A stepwise process for evaluating the appropriateness of any activity used for test-preparation purposes has been summarized in the form of a flowchart. This flowchart is presented in Part 4.

Guidance from Iowa Testing Programs: Iowa Testing Programs (the developers of the *ITBS* and *ITED*), in conjunction with the Iowa Department of Education, disseminated guidance on the development of district policy regarding test use, test preparation, and test security as it relates to the *Iowa Tests* (Iowa Testing Programs, August 2005). This guidance has been incorporated into this module, where appropriate, to promote a consistent message regarding these types of practices.

Scenario Activity: A set of nine scenarios accompanies this module so that you can apply what you have learned regarding the evaluation of the appropriateness of different types of test-preparation activities. These scenarios are best used after the completion of Part 4. Although you can work through these scenarios individually, it’s believed that you would greatly benefit by working in a small group because of the opportunity to interact and exchange ideas and perceptions. There is no need to work through the scenarios sequentially or to complete them all at once—each scenario is independent of the others. Thus, if this professional development module is spread out over multiple days, the scenarios might be an effective way of reviewing previously learned concepts before returning to Parts 5 and 6. The accompanying Scenario Consensus Guide provides a summary of the most salient positive and negative consequences associated with each scenario.

Closing Activity: In Part 2 of the module, a set of common rationales or justifications for why teachers feel compelled to use test-preparation activities is presented. As you proceed through the module, you should gain insight regarding how some of the possible actions taken based on these rationales are problematic. During the closing activity you will be asked to summarize your thoughts and ideas corresponding to these actions. You can then compare your perceptions to those provided in the handout titled *Closing Activity Feedback*.