

## **Scenario Consensus Guide**

### **Instructions**

Once you have reflected upon the potential consequences or outcomes associated with the “test-preparation” activity corresponding to a given scenario, you can compare your perceptions to those presented in this *Consensus Guide*, before moving on to another scenario. Please note that this *Consensus Guide* does not identify all of the potential positive and negative outcomes—only those deemed to be the most salient.

If time is short and you cannot work through all nine of the scenarios, please try to find the time to read through this entire *Consensus Guide*, as each scenario presents a somewhat unique set of issues.

## Scenario Consensus Guide

### Topic: Using Items from the ITBS/ITED

1. Mrs. Potter is very concerned that her 3<sup>rd</sup> graders will not understand what to do when they see the *ITBS* for the first time. She wants her students to feel confident and not anxious when they take the test so their scores show what they know rather than be a reflection of errors caused by nervousness, such as incorrectly filling out bubble sheets. She finds a copy of the *ITBS* that was administered a few years ago and takes a few of the questions from each section the students will be taking. For about 3 weeks, she uses them as warm-up activities.

Criteria	Pros	Cons
<b>Academic Ethics:</b>	None!	<p>If the test “used a few years ago” was the same one that was going to be administered this time, student exposure to these questions would result in the misrepresentation, falsification of information (violation of Standard III of IAC Chapter 25).</p> <p>The action could be viewed as being dishonest, thus hurting the integrity of the teacher &amp; school.</p> <p>The use of <u>any</u> <i>ITBS/ITED</i> test materials is a violation of copyright.</p>
<b>Score Meaning &amp; Use:</b>	Reducing anxiety regarding testing helps students to give their best performance possible, thus yielding a more accurate indication of the student’s learning related to the specific set of content and skill areas covered by the test	<p>If the questions were on the test to be administered, students likely would remember the items and their response would be a reflection of memorization rather than achievement.</p> <p>Even if the questions were not the same as the ones on the test to be administered, the teacher’s instruction will be focused explicitly on the sample of <i>ITBS</i> items. This narrowed focus is likely to result in scores that are higher than they should be (i.e., misrepresentation of information).</p>
<b>Educational Value:</b>	None!	<p>Although the teacher has not dedicated very much instructional time to these “warm-up” activities, the teaching of test-taking skills is more effective if it is done throughout the year, integrated with regular instruction.</p> <p>If the teacher’s concern about lack of familiarity with “filling out bubble sheets” is legitimate, her actions do not address this concern. A more appropriate activity would be to show students a similar answer document and have them practice transferring their answers to the sheets with a couple of multiple-choice questions from her own curricular materials.</p>

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**Topic: Using Items from the ITBS/ITED**

2. While students are quietly taking their tests, Mr. Flanders examines the math section. He notices there are several questions on estimation—a skill his students have been struggling with all year. Thinking he’s just stumbled upon one of those “teachable moments,” he jots down a few of the problems and plans to use them in a short lesson next week when the test is already over.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
<b>Academic Ethics:</b>	The ITBS math scores for his students were <u>not</u> compromised because the practice took place after the test was completed	<p>The action could be viewed as being dishonest, thus hurting the integrity of the teacher &amp; school.</p> <p>The use of <u>any</u> ITBS/ITED test materials is a violation of copyright (regardless of when it took place).</p>
<b>Score Meaning &amp; Use:</b>	The teacher is using this information with students after the test has been completed. Thus, the students’ scores on the test were not impacted.	The teacher has incorporated “live” ITBS items into his instructions. If he uses these items for instructional purposes in future years, it is likely that students’ scores will be higher than they should be on this particular set of skills because of the students’ exposure to the exact same items in advance of testing.
<b>Educational Value:</b>	The teacher is focused on an activity for which the objective is genuine reteaching/learning.	It does not appear as if learning would be negatively impacted. However, this practice would violate academic ethics and potentially compromise the meaning of scores in the future.

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<b>Topic: Using Items from the ITBS/ITED</b>
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3. The administration and staff at Roy G. Biv Elementary have decided they really need to focus on their non-proficient and special education students. Feeling that these students need more repetition and “real” examples of what to expect on the test, certain teachers have been designated to work with these students using portions of the tests administered last year. The teachers walk the students through how to figure out the right answers and then have students do more of the problems on their own.

Criteria	Pros	Cons
<b>Academic Ethics:</b>	None!	<p>The teachers have incorporated “live” ITBS items into their instructions. The form of the tests administered last year will also be administered next year. And, due to the fact that some of the items are used on tests for adjacent grade levels, it is highly likely that students will see some of these same items next year.</p> <p>The action could be viewed as being dishonest, thus hurting the integrity of the teacher &amp; school.</p> <p>The use of <u>any</u> ITBS/ITED test materials is a violation of copyright.</p>
<b>Score Meaning &amp; Use:</b>	None!	<p>By narrowing the focus of instruction for these students on the specific set of skill/content areas tested, the scores are likely to be higher than they should be for these students and the extent to which the scores can be used to make inferences to a larger domain has been limited.</p> <p>The scores resulting from the use of this same test next year are likely to be higher than they should be (see academic ethics).</p>
<b>Educational Value:</b>	<p>The staff at this school is genuinely committed to helping students who struggle to achieve their fullest potential. It’s also encouraging that instructional time is not being taken away from the average and high achieving students who may not need the extra preparation.</p>	<p>The extra focus on test preparation for these students could result in a loss of instructional time in other important content for these students.</p> <p>The scores for these students might be an over estimate of their level of achievement, thus they might miss out on important educational interventions needed to assist their learning (see score meaning and use).</p>

## Scenario Consensus Guide

### Topic: Teaching Test-Taking Skills

4. Mrs. Bucket is a firm believer that learning how to take tests benefits students not only on classroom and college entrance assessments but also in life after high school where tests are potentially involved. Using the curricular units planned for the month prior to the administration of the *ITED*, she has developed several lessons to review pacing and multiple-choice strategies with her 9<sup>th</sup> graders.

Criteria	Pros	Cons
<b>Academic Ethics:</b>	It does not appear as if the teacher is using content directly connected to what is on the <i>ITED</i> .	None
<b>Score Meaning &amp; Use:</b>	The teacher is focused on teaching lessons that will transfer to other situations rather than just in improving <i>ITED</i> test scores.  Might increase the accuracy of the scores	Nothing obvious.  But, it depends on the specific strategies being taught. Answering questions correctly by using "tricks" instead of content-related skills can result in scores being on overestimate of student achievement.
<b>Educational Value:</b>	It is encouraging that the teacher is not interrupting her regular curriculum for instruction in order to work on test-taking skills.	The instruction on test-taking skills is only occurring one month in advance of taking the <i>ITED</i> . To be more effective, these types of skills should be taught throughout the year. If the skills are only emphasized right before the <i>ITBS</i> or <i>ITED</i> , students are not likely to internalize these skills and understand the applicability to other contexts. If the skills were taught well before the <i>ITED</i> is given and merely reviewed just prior to testing, this would represent more sound instructional practice.  Using activities with <u>all</u> students is a waste of time for those students who do not need the review.

## Scenario Consensus Guide

### Topic: Teaching Test-Taking Skills

5. Mr. Eliot believes in the appropriateness of teaching his 6<sup>th</sup> graders test-taking skills such as pacing and multiple-choice strategies. However, he wants to be sure the content used in the practices he designs for students is also beneficial. He looks to page 55 of the *Iowa Tests Interpretative Guide for Teachers and Counselors* and sees that the Social Studies test contains items on the “Earth’s features”—a topic he covered earlier in the year. He decides to spend some time the week before the test teaching students specific test-taking strategies using passages, graphs, and diagrams about the earth’s features as practice.

Criteria	Pros	Cons
<b>Academic Ethics:</b>	The teacher is not using test questions that are on either the current or previous forms of the <i>ITBS</i> .	None
<b>Score Meaning &amp; Use:</b>	The teacher is teaching test-taking skills in the context of the class he teaches. Contextualizing these skills in this way could help students transfer the skills to other types of assessments.	By spending time right before the test reviewing content to be tested, there is the possibility that student scores will be higher than they should be. Although the teacher’s intent was to assist students with their test-taking skills, by using a content area known to be on the test the scores for these students could be higher than what they would have received if the test-taking strategies had been practiced using a different set of content/skill areas. When this type of practice occurs, students have been given an advantage over other students and it is no longer possible to make fair comparisons across groups of students.
<b>Educational Value:</b>	The teacher is reviewing previously learned content, which is generally an educationally sound practice. But, by using only content related to the Earth’s surface, the teacher is placing greater emphasis on this content area than on other important areas. Reviewing content that has not been taught yet would not be educationally sound (e.g., teaching multiplication before addition/subtraction) and thus, would not be appropriate.	The instruction on test-taking skills is only occurring the week before the test. To be more effective, these types of skills should be taught throughout the year. If the skills are only emphasized right before the <i>ITBS</i> or <i>ITED</i> , students are not likely to internalize these skills and understand the applicability to other contexts. If the skills were taught well before the <i>ITBS</i> is given and merely reviewed just prior to testing, this would represent sound instructional practice.

## Scenario Consensus Guide

**Topic: Teaching Test-Taking Skills**

6. Mr. Emerson knows that many of his students struggle with taking timed tests. They often get stuck on a question, spending so much time on it that they run out of time before they finish all of the questions. He also knows that unless the students qualify for extended time as an accommodation for special needs, it's important that students not have additional time when taking the *Iowa Tests*. So, instead, whenever he administers the *Iowa Tests* he gives students a two-minute warning. He notifies students that there are only 2 minutes remaining and tells them to "Make sure you put something down for every question—if it's left blank, it's counted as being wrong."

Criteria	Pros	Cons
<b>Academic Ethics:</b>	None	This practice violates the standard directions for administration, thus could be considered a violation of academic ethics.
<b>Score Meaning &amp; Use:</b>	The teacher is focusing on time management, an important test-taking skills, instead of providing content-related assistance.	<p>When warned that only a short amount of time remains in the testing period, some students become anxious and are not able to put forth their best effort when attempting to answer the remaining questions.</p> <p>The teacher's advice about not leaving any questions blank is prompting students to randomly guess at the remaining questions. Educated guesses resulting from the elimination of at least one of the response options can provide some relevant information about the student's level of competence, whereas random guessing provides no useful information. Thus, questions answered correctly as a result of random guessing contribute to test scores that overestimate the student's performance.</p>
<b>Educational Value:</b>	None	The teacher is teaching test-taking skills during the test instead of in the context of the class he teaches. Contextualizing these skills in this way could help students transfer the skills to other types of assessments.

## Scenario Consensus Guide

### Topic: Using Practice Tests

7. The math department at Tornado Alley High School spent a summer developing math practice tests in response to poor scores on the *ITEDs* over the last few years, which culminated in the school being placed on the SINA list. To identify specific areas of weakness, the staff reviewed previous test results and identified those for which their students scored quite a bit lower. In developing the practice tests, teachers did not have access to actual *ITED* tests but rather a list of general skill areas. The test questions developed by the teachers represent the types of content and skills covered in the *Concepts and Problem Solving* test, such as *Data Analysis/Probability/Statistics*. All math teachers are required to administer these practice tests once a month for the three months preceding the January administration of the *ITED*. They then use results from these practice tests to identify areas where students need additional assistance and provide remediation where necessary. The staff believes that these tests help students become more familiar with the format of the test questions as well as help reinforce previously learned content.

Criteria	Pros	Cons
<b>Academic Ethics:</b>	The teachers are not using test questions that are on either current or previous forms of the <i>ITED</i> .	None
<b>Score Meaning &amp; Use:</b>	Teachers have used <i>ITED</i> scores to identify areas of weaknesses and have developed practices that cover general topics rather than exact items found on the <i>ITEDs</i> .  Additionally, the tests also help students practice using the format of the test, helping to ensure that errors are a result of lack of achievement and not because of a lack of understanding based on how the question was worded.	Nothing obvious
<b>Educational Value:</b>	The teachers are reviewing previously learned content, which is generally an educationally sound practice.	Test preparation activities probably should be limited to assisting those who need help rather than for use with all students. At the high school level, it's likely that lower achieving students may need this type of assistance more than higher achieving students.  Given that the practice test is administered once a month for three months, one needs to consider the "costs" associated with spending this much time away from instruction. Does the amount of learning gained outweigh the lost opportunities?

## Scenario Consensus Guide

<b>Topic: Reviewing Content/Skill Areas</b>
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8. Mrs. Graham, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher, has always taught measurement skills at the end of the year after her students have been exposed to fractions. Because measurement is an area her students do poorly on in October when they take the *ITBS*, she has decided to move her measurement unit from the end of the year to the beginning and spend less time on fractions. She believes that if her students get just get a few more questions right, the scores will go up and her school will look better in the public's eye.

Criteria	Pros	Cons
<b>Academic Ethics:</b>	The teacher is not using test questions that are on either current or previous forms of the <i>ITBS</i> .	None
<b>Score Meaning &amp; Use:</b>	The teacher is covering skills that are part of the school's curriculum	Any time the intent associated with a given test preparation activity is focused more on the improvement of scores instead of the improvement of student learning, the activity has the potential to interfere with making sound inferences regarding student learning. In this case, student performance in the area of fractions is likely to suffer because of time being reallocated to measurement. How does this realignment of emphasis impact the overall math score? What types of inferences could be made about changes in performance?
<b>Educational Value:</b>	None	The sequencing of content/skill areas in the curriculum should be based on a thorough understanding of prerequisite skills related to the discipline area and an understanding of how best to structure the learning environment to build essential links between concepts and ideas. Sometimes it is educationally appropriate to rearrange content and sometimes it is not. In this case, students may have difficulty understanding fractions of units of measurement (i.e., 1/8 of an inch), thus making it difficult for them to learn the skill and ultimately limiting their attainment of the skill.

## Scenario Consensus Guide

### Topic: Reviewing Content/Skill Areas

9. Mr. Tippy believes that it's most appropriate to continually review learned content throughout the year to help ensure retention rather than doing review in a "one shot deal." However, he knows that reviewing some of the content that he teaches is more important than others because it is on the test. For example, he knows students are more likely to encounter questions on interpreting political cartoons than specific questions regarding the disbandment of the Soviet Union. Therefore, for about a month before the test, he finds a political cartoon in the media and does a daily warm-up with students, walking them through the process of interpreting its meaning.

Criteria	Pros	Cons
<b>Academic Ethics:</b>	The teacher is using real life examples from the media rather than cartoons found on the test. This helps ensure that students can apply what they have learned to any cartoon rather than just a select few found on the test.	None
<b>Score Meaning &amp; Use:</b>	The teacher is using real life examples from the media rather than cartoons found on the test. This helps ensure that students can apply what they have learned to any cartoon rather than just a select few found on the test.	Any time a teacher makes a judgment that one content area is more important than another because it is on the test, the teacher runs the risk of focusing on that content, thus inflating the test scores. This inflation would make it more difficult to make sound generalizations about the students' overall social studies achievement.
<b>Educational Value:</b>	The skill he is reviewing, interpretation of political cartoons, is actually a multifaceted skill that involves the ability to understand propaganda techniques, current events, innuendo, etc. These skills transfer to areas other than social studies.	The review is only occurring the month before the test. To be more effective, these types of skills should be taught throughout the year. If the skills are only emphasized right before the <i>ITBS/ITED</i> , students are not likely to internalize these skills and understand the applicability to other contexts. If the skills were taught well before the <i>ITBS/ITED</i> is given and merely reviewed just prior to testing, this would represent sounder instructional practice.