Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the District Benchmark Assessment (DBA)

- **What is a benchmark assessment?**

  A benchmark is a test that monitors achievement to date, measuring a student’s mastery against a marker or expectation for that point in time.

- **How does the previous short cycle assessment (A2L) Math assessment differ from the DBA?**

  The short cycle assessment was a survey assessment measuring year end expectations from the beginning of the year to the end of the year with a sliding proficiency band.

  The DBA Math for 2009-2010 is a benchmark test to look at point in time achievement of standards using a consistent performance band.

- **Why did the district select a benchmark assessment system?**

  The research indicates that benchmark assessments allow students to achieve sustained learning by pacing the standards in smaller groupings. This is a national trend seen across education.

- **Did the cut scores or performance bands change for the DBA?**

  Yes, the cut scores or performance bands were changed to create consistency from Elementary through High School for a fluid data transition. High Schools and Middle Schools have been applying these performance bands for the past three years.

- **What impact will the new cut scores or performance bands have on my classroom data or my student data?**

  The data from the fall window indicates a larger percentage of students in the Nearing Proficient range with fewer students in the remaining performance bands. This mirrors the expected outcome of the change.
• **How are the scores from DBA utilized?**

The DBA scores are used in the classroom to:
- Drive instruction
- Individualize instruction
- Inform AIP (Academic Improvement Plan)
- Measure student growth
- Encourage student responsibility for learning

• **Which assessment window data influences the AIP (Academic Improvement Process) for students?**

The spring window of 2009 informed the AIP decisions for the fall of 2009.

• **What are the most effective reports from DataDirector™ for teachers to view?**

There are a variety of reports located on DataDirector. Teachers have commented on the benefits of the Classroom Exam Reports. Teachers can also view data reports on individual students within their classroom.

• **What is the most effective report from DataDirector for teachers to share with students and parents?**

The Student Exam Report (Complete) which includes:
- Performance Summary
- Performance on standards assessed
- Response Frequency

• **How do I explain the change in cut scores or performance bands to parents?**

Please refer to the third bullet for background information on the rationale for the change.

The performance bands are a guideline to student performance on the assessment. What is more important than the proficiency bands is the information provided by the assessment on how students are performing on content standards.

• **How is growth measured on a benchmark assessment?**

Growth is measured by how the student performs on the content standards on each of the three district benchmark assessments. Each assessment contains content standards that reflect the content that has been taught in the classroom up to that point in time. In each assessment window, new standards are taught and previous standards are expanded upon. A consistent performance band across the three assessment windows such as proficient may indicate growth.
**The Reading DBA for grades 3-5 have very low scores. What attributes to this?**

In looking at the district data from 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, there is a slight decrease from last academic year to this academic year. This decrease in scores is most likely attributed to the fact that the cut score for proficiency was raised slightly this year. The reading assessments have been reviewed for alignment and the assessments were benchmarked in the 2008-2009 school year.

**The Math DBA scores at grades 1-2 are much higher than the results on grades 3-5. Why?**

This is the first year that all first and second graders are taking the DBA. At this early point in the school year, we do not have the comparative data needed to evaluate district-wide performance on this assessment.

The first and second grade DBA cannot be compared directly to the DBA at third, fourth and fifth grades. Students in the intermediary grades are expected to take the DBA independently whereas primary grade students cannot be expected to take an assessment without assistance.

**How should I progress monitor my students between assessment windows?**

As teachers are aware, there are several ways to monitor students between windows. Teachers have already implemented ongoing, formative classrooms assessments through the school’s core curriculum programs.

**How will following the Curriculum Maps for Math and Reading benefit my students?**

The curriculum maps are tools to assist teachers in navigating the state standards required at each grade level. The maps help teachers to know which standards to focus on in the core curriculum programs throughout the academic year.

**How do I as a classroom teacher use the DBA?**

Teachers use the standards based data from the DBA as part of their ongoing formative assessment to drive instruction in the classroom. The data from the DBA indicates where students have strengths and where they may have areas of need.
• **Why do the DBA Reading Assessments appear to be the same as the short cycle assessments (A2L) from last year?**

The assessments were reviewed and aligned to New Mexico state standards and were benchmarked in the summer of 2008. The multiple choice format of the DBA limits the content standards that can be assessed.

• **The results on the DBA Reading Assessment are lower this year than last year. How could this happen if the assessment was not changed?**

The decrease in scores is most likely a result of the change to the cut scores. The cut score for proficiency was raised slightly this year.

• **Will any of the DBAs be changed for the 2010-2011 school year?**

All of the DBAs are constantly under review. If there appears to be a reason for change on any of the DBAs, due to changes in New Mexico state standards, etc., the Assessment Department will work with teachers and instructional coaches to make the necessary revisions to the assessments.

• **My colleagues and I are concerned about the wording of the questions. Where do these items come from?**

Questions on the DBA come from an item bank from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. These items are written and formatted by content specialists and all items are nationally field tested before they are available to APS. Test questions and distractors are written to specifically uncover common misunderstandings that students may have on the content standards being tested.

In addition, APS Assessment takes great care in following a process to choose the best items possible from this bank of items when building an assessment.

• **The vocabulary of the DBA is not aligned to the vocabulary in the math core program or the vocabulary I use in teaching reading.**

The DBA is not aligned to any core program. The DBA is a standards based assessment. Teachers should refer to the curriculum maps for their grade level for pacing of standards and assessment information.

• **We’re concerned that the DBA is not a valid test because it is not a norm referenced test. Are there plans to norm the test?**

The DBA is a criterion referenced test, not a norm referenced test. All students are being assessed against the content standards; students are not being compared to other students.