

## A Brief History of Essential Academic Learning Requirements and the Washington Assessment of Student Learning

In 1993, Washington State embarked on the development of a comprehensive school change effort that has as its primary goal the improvement of teaching and learning. Created by the state legislature in 1993, the Commission on Student Learning was charged with three important tasks in support of this school change effort:

- to establish Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) that describe what all students should know and be able to do in eight content areas--reading, writing, communication, mathematics, science, health and fitness, social studies and the arts;
- to develop an assessment system to measure student progress at three grade levels towards achieving the EALRs; and
- to recommend an accountability system that recognizes and rewards successful schools and provides support and assistance to less successful schools.

### ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION ON STUDENT LEARNING

The Commission achieved its first major task. The EALRs in Reading, Writing, Communications and Mathematics were first adopted in 1995 and revised in 1997 (See <http://www.k12.wa.us/curriculuminstruct/EALRs.asp> for the EALRs in all subject areas). Performance “benchmarks” were also established at three grade levels – elementary (Grade 4), middle (Grade 7), and high school (Grade 10). The EALRs for Science, Social Studies, Health and Fitness and the Arts were initially adopted in 1996 and also revised in 1997. Performance benchmarks for these subject areas were also established at three levels – elementary, middle and high school.

The Commission's second major task was to develop an assessment system to determine the extent to which students are achieving the knowledge and skills defined by the EALRs. The assessments for Reading, Writing and Mathematics for Grade 4 were operational beginning in the spring of 1997. Grade 7 assessments were operational beginning in the spring of 1998. Grade 10 assessments were operational beginning in the spring of 1999. Participation in the Grade 4 assessment was mandatory for all public schools beginning spring, 1998.

The Commission completed its work in 1999 and was dissolved. All subsequent testing and test development has been conducted by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Under the auspices of OSPI, assessments in Science were developed and became operational for Grades 8 and 10 beginning in the spring of 2003 and for Grade 5 beginning in the spring of 2004.

### THE WASHINGTON ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The Washington Assessment System has four major components: state-level assessments, classroom-based assessments, professional development and school and system context indicators. These components are described briefly below. Two additional features, the Certificate of Academic Achievement and the Accountability System, are also briefly described.

#### State-Level Assessments in Reading, Writing, Mathematics and Science

The state-level assessments require students to both select and create answers to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understanding in each of the EALRs. Student, school, and district scores are reported for the operational assessments. The state-level operational test

forms are standardized and "on demand," meaning that all students respond to the same items, under the same conditions, and at the same time during the school year.

All of the state-level assessments are untimed; that is, students may have as much time as they reasonably need to complete their work. Guidelines for providing accommodations to students with special needs have been developed to encourage the inclusion of as many students as possible. Special need students include those in special education programs, those with Section 504 plans, English language learners (ESL/bilingual), migrant students and highly capable students. A broad range of accommodations allows nearly all students access to some or all parts of the assessment (see *Guidelines for Inclusion and Accommodations for Special Populations on State-Level Assessments*).

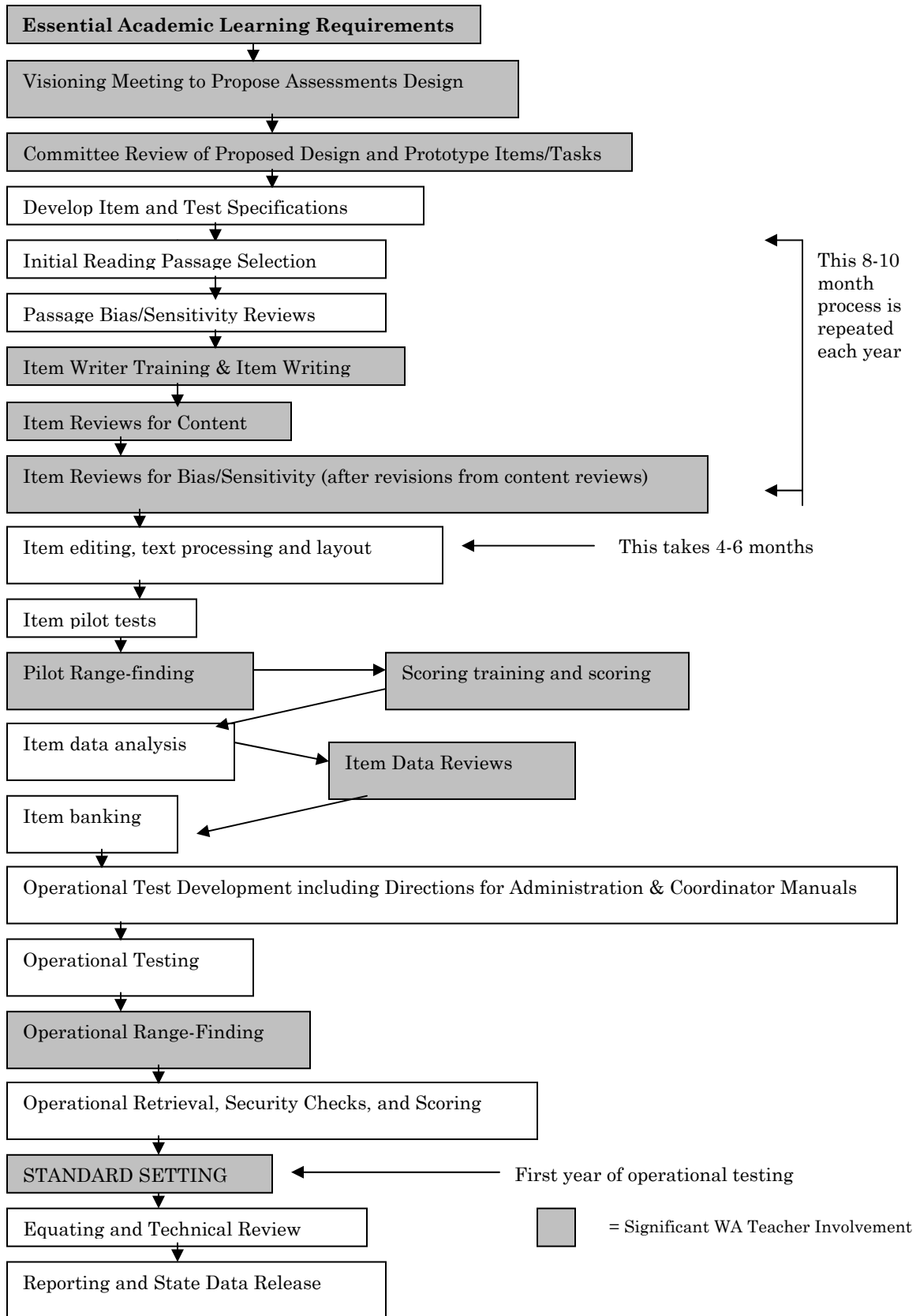
From the outset, classroom teachers and curriculum specialists from across Washington were selected to assist with the development of the items for the state-level assessments. Content committees were created at each grade level. Working with representatives from the testing contractor and with content and assessment specialists from OSPI, these committees have defined and refined the test and item specifications consistent with the Washington State EALRs, reviewed all items prior to pilot testing, and provided final review and approval of all items after pilot testing. A separate "bias and sensitivity" committee, composed of individuals reflective of Washington's diversity, also reviewed all items for words or content that might be offensive to students or parents, or might disadvantage some students for reasons unrelated to the skill or concept being assessed.

Hundreds of items have been continuously developed in each subject area and pilot-tested to create a "pool" of items. Since 2001, all items have been written by Washington teachers during item writing workshops. This ongoing item development allows for the creation of new forms of the assessment each year by sampling from the pool. Statistical "equating" procedures are used to maintain the same performance standard from year to year, and to provide longitudinal comparisons across years even though different items are used. The state-level assessments in Reading, Science, and Mathematics include a mix of multiple-choice, short-answer, and extended-response items. At the state level, the Writing assessment includes two writing prompts.

Following the first operational assessment at each grade level, a standard-setting committee determined the level of performance (number and content of items students should perform correctly) on the assessments associated with having mastered the Essential Academic Learning Requirements. In addition, "proficiency categories" (Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, Advanced) were established to show growth over time as well as to give students and parents an indication of the student's performance in relation to the standard. School and district performance on the assessments is reported in terms of the percentage of students meeting the standard and in each of the proficiency categories.

Figure A-1 on the next page shows the entire development process for the WASL.

**Figure A-1: WASL Development Process**



For more information about the EALRs, the WASL, research on the WASL, and materials to help teachers create their own assessments, visit OSPI's website: [www.k12.wa.us](http://www.k12.wa.us).

For information on the EALRs, access materials via the Curriculum and Instruction homepage: [www.k12.wa.us/CurriculumInstruct/default.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/CurriculumInstruct/default.aspx).

For information about WASL, go to the WASL homepage:  
[www.k12.wa.us/assessment/WASL/overview.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/WASL/overview.aspx).

For technical reports reporting the validity and reliability data for WASL, go to  
[www.k12.wa.us/assessment/TestAdministration.aspx#techrpt](http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/TestAdministration.aspx#techrpt).

Finally, for materials that teachers can use in the classroom to develop their own assessments of the EALRs, the next pages shows how to access these materials from the WASL homepage.

To access materials for teachers, go first to the WASL homepage. Then open the WASL menu.

