

Standardized Testing: Comprehensive Testing Program by ERB

The ACCS Board of Directors has been pleased with what it has seen of the Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP 4), published by the Educational Records Bureau (ERB), and is encouraging (*not* requiring) ACCS schools to use this test (CTP 4) as their exam of choice. The CTP 4 is a norm referenced test.

I. Why the CTP 4 Test?

A. Measurement and comparison: “*When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.*” (II Corinthians 10:12b)

Before you begin testing, you should identify your testing goals. What are you trying to measure and for what purpose?

Standardized test results are one piece of information that helps teachers and parents understand how well children are learning. To obtain an accurate picture of a student, standardized test results should be evaluated along with report cards, teacher’s observations and comments, and parental observations. Test results are only one piece of a broad picture.

Administrators, board members, teachers, and parents are also interested in measuring how well their school is educating students. Standardized tests help schools evaluate their performance.

Classical Christian schools typically have high educational goals. Schools that want excellence and who want to be considered outstanding, must consider what type of school they are going to compare themselves to. Do they want to compare themselves to all schools including public schools? Or do they want to compare themselves to elite private schools, some with very selective admission standards?

The CTP 4 test provides classical Christian schools with the opportunity to compare themselves to three key groups: public schools, private schools, and other ACCS schools. This is done through the use of National Norms, Independent (School) Norms, and Association Norms. (There is also a Suburban [Public] Schools Norm which may not be the best option for comparison for classical Christian schools. These are high achieving *public* schools, just not the best match for ACCS schools, i.e., private schools.)

B. Scoring options:

New schools: New schools need to establish credibility with parents and their surrounding community. One option for these schools is to have tests scored on three norms, but only publish national norm results. National norm scores on the CTP 4 test will likely look very similar to results on other popular standardized tests. ACCS schools will probably earn high marks, the publication of which can help them during their building years.

Established schools: Once a school has become established, standardized test scores should be used to help schools determine both where they are doing well and more importantly, where to focus their efforts for improvement. Of course everyone likes to see standardized test results with all national norms above the 85 percentile. However, high scores may not help the administrator or curriculum committee target areas for improvement. In these situations, the use of Independent School Norms and the Association Norm become quite valuable. Schools will likely see a much broader range of scores than they see on the National Norms. High scores will represent areas of real achievement. Lower scores will help guide curriculum review and faculty training.

Before publishing Independent School Norms for the first time, schools should educate their parents first. This may be done by using the ERB membership directory to find the schools

in your area that use the CTP 4. Schools should explain that these are the schools that they are comparing themselves to when using the Independent School Norm. (Schools who are members of ERB are listed here: <http://www.erbtest.org/schools/new/#membership-directory>)

The CTP 4 provides schools with a number of options for scoring. Schools may order tests scores for multiple norm groups. They may also decide which of these scores to publish to parents and which to use to guide internal discussions.

C. Test content

The subtests that comprise the CTP 4 tests focus on the core curriculum of reading, writing, and math. Listening skills are also tested in younger students. The narrow focus of these subtests helps keep testing times short. The exclusion of other subjects like social studies and study skills that may not match the curriculum is also a benefit. The broader emphasis on Language Arts is a good match to the classical Christian model. Students will likely find the reading selections and content questions to be more challenging and interesting than those on other tests. Eighth grade math tests provide some integration with logic skills.

D. Evaluation

ERB will send three sample tests to any school considering the use of the CTP 4. Order the tests and let your teachers or curriculum committee examine the tests to see how well they align with your curriculum objectives. (The sample tests must be returned to ERB.)

II. **Once schools have decided to use the CTP 4**

A. ERB membership

Schools who want to use the CTP 4 must first apply and be approved for membership in ERB. Schools must meet two of three criteria, one of which involves being sponsored by two current ERB members. The ERB membership directory is located at: <http://www.erbtest.org/schools/new/#membership-directory>. It is searchable by state.

The Head Administrator of the applying school should contact a potential sponsor school's Head Administrator, and ask if they would be willing to sponsor their school, and find out any criteria that the requested sponsor school may have before it would be comfortable sponsoring the school.

B. Testing calendar: fall or spring?

The CTP 4 offers norms for two testing periods, a fall norm and a spring norm.

Most schools, including most ACCS schools, give standardized tests in the spring. The spring norm is calculated on more individual test scores than the fall norm. Schools use spring testing to measure what the students have learned during that school year.

However, schools should also consider giving tests in the fall, perhaps in late September or early October once teachers have finished reviewing information taught the previous year. This measures what the students have learned *and retained* from the previous year. Schools who use a fall norm will receive their test results back while teachers are available to discuss results and make timely modifications to curriculum to strengthen weak areas.

C. Association of Classical & Christian Schools Norm

The norm for ACCS is one of the ERB's Association Norms. You have to ask for it and there is an additional fee for scoring.

CTP 4 does offer schools the option of an Association Norm (AN) for the Association of Classical and Christian Schools. This norm allows schools to see where their students' performance ranks in relation to all other ACCS schools using the CTP 4. You must request this Association Norm from ERB it is not included in the basic scoring services package. Schools who wish to order the Association Norm must contact ERB directly. (See page 8 of the 2008-09 ERB catalog.) The toll-free number for the CTP 4 Operations Office is (866) 683-2335. Be sure to tell them that your school is an ACCS member. You will also have to fill out the proper oval on the Order for Scoring Services.

The Association scores will be reported on a separate Association Norm Report. (See page 25 of the 2008-09 ERB catalog for a sample of this report.) This report includes student names at each grade tested, scale scores, norm group comparison (percentile and stanine) by school and up to five associations, beginning with ACCS as the primary AN for each member.

In addition to the separate AN Report, schools may request inclusion of their primary association on the following existing CTP 4 reports: Class Roster, Individual Subscore or Narrative Report (reports to parents), and label sets.

ERB offers a variety of consultation services to schools. For more information on the CTP 4 Tests, visit the ERB website at <http://www.erbtest.org>.