

## Take Home Unit II Exam

**This is an independent take-home exam. Your research should be done individually and not in cooperation with any of your classmates.**

### Directions:

1. *Part I: Investigate possible solutions to this problem and report in writing on your research. You can use information you solicit from a local school district, your text, handouts from class, the course website, the internet, library resources or any other reliable source you can gain access to. Summarize in writing the information you gather through your research.*
2. *Part 2: Based on your research, select a course of action and respond to the scenario questions. Decide what action you will take and explain the rationale for your response. Support your course of action with reliable references and resources. Explain in detail (starting from the beginning of the scenario) how you would handle this situation. Be certain to discuss the multiple stakeholders and issues at play.*
3. *Cite applicable resources and references you use to come up with your plan. APA format is not required, resources can simply be listed.*
4. *Your exam should be 3-4 pages in length, typed and double spaced.*

2. Attached to this page is a "Testing Dilemma" that could certainly be a true situation in your PA school district. Please read the double-sided story and pretend you are Mrs./Mr. Karing (the special education teacher on the IEP team). One of our roles and responsibilities is appropriate communication skills for not only the family members, but for school personnel with whom we work. Please comment on the following questions:

- a. What is your impression of what Dr. Wise said as the alternative solution, regarding objections for religious reasons in this particular situation? Do you have any comments on his professional ethics for suggesting this, or do parents have the right to know ALL alternatives in the case like this?
- b. Pretend Dr. Wise asked YOU, the special education teacher, to give suggestions to Mrs. Lee in front of the whole IEP team, instead of HIM informing mom about the "religious reasons" alternative. Please give a detailed account of both what you would say in the meeting and what you might like to say in the meeting, but would be reluctant to do so.

## TESTING DILEMMA

It was a bright May morning when Sam's (Samantha's) IEP team convened in the elementary school's conference room. The team was composed of: Sam's mother, Mrs. Lee; her Special Education teacher, Mrs. Karing; her General Education teacher, Miss Fuller; the Principal, Mr. Wright; and the District's Supervisor of Special Education, Dr. Elana Wise. Dr. Wise led the meeting. When the meeting moved on to the present level of educational performance statements, Dr. Wise turned the leadership over to Mrs. Karing.

Mrs. Karing reported that Sam had improved a full half grade level in reading and was now reading at the beginning of mid-second grade level. The remainder of the present levels contained equally impressive progress in the areas of math, written expression, handwriting, oral language and study/organization skills. Mrs. Lee was delighted with Sam's progress.

After going over the goals, short-term objectives, specially designed instruction, related services and extended school year sections, Dr. Wise resumed leadership and began the section on state- and district-wide testing.

Since Sam was now in fourth grade, the team had to make decisions related to the mandatory state testing in fifth grade. Because Pennsylvania mandates testing of all fifth-, eighth-, and eleventh-grade students and, since Sam would be a fifth grader next year, Sam is required to participate in the testing.

"This section relates to tests that are given by the state and the district," intoned Dr. Wise. "Since Sam will be a fifth grader next year, she will be required to participate in the state reading and math testing. The test is called the PSSA (Pennsylvania System of State Assessment). As you can see on this page of the IEP, we have to make one of three choices. The first is to have Sam take the PSSA without accommodations. The second choice is for her to take the same PSSA with accommodations: the kind that are described in the specially designed instruction section of her IEP. The

third option is for Sam to take the alternate assessment called the PASA (the Pennsylvania Alternative System of Assessment). This PASA is intended for students who have skills that are basically kindergarten or lower. Since Sam is functioning at the second grade level, we recommend that she take the PSSA with accommodations. How does this sound, Mrs. Lee?"

"I do have a concern," she offered. "I have a neighbor, Mrs. Prince, whose son, Darren, is in fifth grade. He also has an IEP. We were chatting about how Sam and Darren were doing. She talked about the state testing situation and said that she was very displeased. She said that Darren's IEP team had made the decision to have Darren take the PSSA.

"He took the PSSA with accommodations-the same as you are offering for Sam. She told how humiliated her son felt by the process. He told her that the test made him feel 'stupid' because he didn't know anything on the test. This upset her. She said that she asked for an explanation from you, Mr. Wright, and that you referred her to Dr. Wise."

Mrs. Lee went on, "She said that the reason that you gave for Darren's experience was that, since Darren was reading at much less than fifth grade level and since the test questions are geared to someone with fifth grade ability, that the district expected that Darren would not be able to answer any of the questions. Is this true?"

Dr. Wise began, "Since any conversation with Darren's mother would be confidential information, I cannot comment on any conversation that we might have had. However, I can speak to the issue of the level of the test. The test is geared for students with fifth grade skills and a student with skills one or more grade levels below fifth, would find the test difficult."

Mrs. Lee jumped in, "If such is the case, then why should Sam, Darren or any other kid be put through the stress of such testing, if they haven't a chance of passing it. That doesn't make much sense to me. If you already know that a student is reading at the second grade level, then why use a fifth grade test? Why not put a second grade test in front of her?"

"I understand your concerns, Mrs. Lee. Many other parents have voiced the same concerns. I wish that the situation was different, but the state has provided IEP teams with only three options-the PSSA with no accommodations; the PSSA with accommodations or the PASA, the alternative assessment. We are required to choose one of them. Sorry."

"Wouldn't it be better for Sam to take the alternative test?" picked up Mrs. Lee. "Even though it only goes up to kindergarten level, at least she would be able to answer the questions and come away feeling smarter rather than taking the PSSA test and coming away feeling stupid. I am especially concerned about her feeling defeated since she has done so well this year and hopefully will be doing well next year also. Such a failure experience could be a major blow to her self-confidence."

"Well, your reasoning works well except for one thing: the state does not want more than a small percentage of students to take the alternative assessment and it has set out very specific guidelines for taking the alternative test. Sam does not appear to qualify under those guidelines," offered Dr. Wise.

"Is there nothing that we can do to avoid such a predictable failure experience?" asked Mrs. Lee, almost pleadingly.

Dr. Wise tried to answer Mrs. Lee's question. "Let me say that we are as upset and frustrated as you over this situation. It seems that we are all stuck. What we have done in our district to help eliminate the potential failure experience by our 'gap kids' - this is the name that is being used for those kids who are too advanced to take the alternative assessment and not far enough advanced to take the PSSA-is to set them up to take the test in a separate room. We direct them to fill in their names and other identifying information and then to answer as many questions as they can. When they are finished, they go back to their resource room where they can continue to receive instruction in reading or math or do individual work from their folders. In this way we try to minimize any prolonged exposure to failure and continue the instruction that they need."

"That sounds better than the picture of prolonged stress that I had conjured up in my mind. But is there no way that Sam can be exempted from taking this test?"

"There is one alternative," responded Dr. Wise. "A parent can object to the testing for religious reasons. It requires that the parents look at the test, determine that the test violates their religious beliefs and then sign a statement to that effect."

"Do we have to be of a particular faith?" asked Mrs. Lee.

"No," said Dr. Wise. "Not only is basically any religious belief acceptable, but the parent does not even have to specify what particular religious tenet is being violated. The parent has only to sign that there is a conflict. That's all."

"So, either I 'use' my religion or Sam has to take the PSSA. Is that correct?" asked Mrs. Lee with a tone of sarcasm.

"I'm afraid you've summed it up perfectly," said Dr. Wise.

"What a terrible position to place parents and children in. How could this have happened?" she muttered to herself, not expecting an answer. "I guess I will choose to have her take the PSSA test with the accommodations. I thought that the IEP process was supposed to help to tailor testing and instruction to meet students' individual needs. This seems to violate those principles. This has to be fixed."

"Yes, Mrs. Lee, this must be fixed, for Sam and for all of our 'gap kids'," added Dr. Wise.