**ITBS Norm-referenced Test vs. STAAR Criterion Referenced Test**

STAAR-**Criterion Referenced Tests (CRT)** are the simplest to understand. On Criterion Referenced Tests a committee (usually consisting of educators, content area specialists, and state administrators) look at a battery of questions matched to the curriculum and for each question they determine if a “minimally competent” student in that subject area would get the question correct or incorrect. After all the items have been examined the committee’s recommendations are taken and used to create “cut scores.” These scores will mark the difference between a student who “Meets” standards or “Does not Meet.” As an example, a math test might have 60 questions with a cut score of 33. This would mean that a student who gets 33 out of 60 questions correct would “Meet” standards while a student who correctly answers 32 out of 60 questions would be classified as “Does Not Meet.” For Criterion Referenced Tests the State of Texas commissions committees each year to set the cut scores for each assessment. The cut score for a given test might be different depending on the subject, grade, and year.

**ITBS- Norm-Referenced Tests (NRT)** measure similar skills to Criterion Referenced Tests, but do so in a radically different way. Norm-Referenced Tests do not have cut scores and students do not “pass” or “fail” a Norm-Referenced Test. A NRT compares how a particular student’s performance on a skill compares with every other student of his/her age and grade in the country. For example, a particular student might be found to have skills in reading that are superior to 57% of students in the U.S. of his same age and grade. This doesn’t tell us anything about how strong the skill is or how it might match up to the expectations a state curriculum places on a student, but it does offer a comparison to similar students. The comparison groups for NRT’s are created by sampling (much the same way political polls are created by polling a representative sample of U.S. citizens), which on NRT’s are known as “norming.” Norm-Referenced tests are re-normed about every 5-10 years.

Once the two types of tests are understood it should be easier to understand what the various scores that these tests typically provide.

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| **Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)** | | **STAAR** | |
| **Timing of Tests and Results** | Given at the discretion of the school district with results returned within weeks. The tests can be given early enough in the school year such that students can use the results to improve their learning and teachers can use the results to improve their instruction | | Given in April or May and results are returned after the students are released for the summer; in the first year, results have still not been returned nine months later |
| **Comparative Data** | Provides scores that indicate how a student performed against his/her peers in the nation | | Does not provide any comparative data against peers in the state or nation |
| **Grade-level Performance** | Provides data to indicate if a student performed at/below/above his or her grade level | | Does not provide any data to indicate grade-level performance |
| **Diagnostic Information by Subject Area** | Provides some diagnostic data by subject area and concept | | Does not provide any diagnostic data |