

# Technical Report



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## Overview

School professionals recognize that effective school performance depends on a student's ability to perform a variety of functional tasks that enable him or her to participate in various learning activities. Students with disabilities often have difficulty meeting performance expectations on these functional tasks because of limita-

tions from their physical or cognitive impairments. The *School Function Assessment (SFA)* examines a student's ability to perform important functional activities that support or enable participation in the academic and related social aspects of an educational program.

## Uses of SFA

The primary use of SFA is to examine the student's current ability to participate successfully and fully in the educational program and to identify the functional strengths and limitations affecting the student's ability to meet school expectations. Because the assessment is comprehensive, it can be used to help identify areas of limitation not previously recognized and to show changes that may facilitate the student's participation. Examining the student's performance across all physical and cognitive/behavioral tasks may also identify areas of limitation where the impact had been underestimated. SFA provides separate measures of the student's current level of participation in school settings, performance of functional activities, and the supports he or she needs to perform these functional tasks. In addition, items

in Activity Performance scales are listed in order of difficulty, so you can identify the next steps the student may be ready to master in a given area.

SFA also can be used in:

- Prioritizing among areas of need for program planning
- Facilitating collaborative planning
- Developing the IEP
- Preparing for the student's educational transitions
- Documenting progress and effects of intervention
- Collecting administrative data to meet federal and state regulations

# Description of SFA

SFA is comprised of three parts:

**Part I–Participation** is used to examine the student’s level of participation in six major school activity settings: regular or special education classroom, playground or recess, transportation to and from school, bathroom and toileting activities, transitions to and from class, and mealtime or snack time.

**Part II–Task Supports** is used to examine the supports currently provided to the student when he or she performs school-related functional tasks that are required to participate effectively in the education program. Two types of task supports are examined

separately: assistance (adult help) and adaptations (modifications to the environment or program, such as specialized equipment or adapted materials).

**Part III–Activity Performance** is used to examine the student’s performance of specific school-related functional activities. Each scale includes a comprehensive set of activities that share a common functional demand such as moving around the classroom and the school, using school materials, interacting with others, following school rules, and communicating needs. Each set of activities is used to examine in detail one of the tasks addressed globally in Part II.

## Features of SFA

To understand an individual student’s overall school function, a multi-faceted assessment that considers each of the relevant aspects is needed. SFA meets these needs with the following features:

- **It is based on current models of function and special education legislation.**

SFA is based on a multi-level model of functional performance and reflects the focus of current legislation on achieving full participation of students with disabilities in the typical activities and environments of their peers. The test also helps satisfy the requirement that services, such as occupational or physical therapy, be tied to an educationally relevant outcome.

- **Content reflects the functional requirements of elementary school environments.**

The items on SFA focus on behaviors that have clear functional relevance in the elementary school environment. In addition to classroom requirements, SFA addresses a full array of environments typical of most elementary schools, such as the cafeteria, transportation, bathroom, and playground.

- **Items apply to students with a variety of special needs.**

Field testing involved a large, heterogeneous group of students with varying types of disabilities to ensure that wording of each item was appropriate for all students. Individual ratings for each scale were written to apply to students with disabilities across all elementary school grades (K–6).

- **It is designed with a judgment-based format.**

The judgment-based format enables users to obtain information about the student’s typical performance as observed by those who

work with him or her regularly in school. This method of gathering information provides a more valid profile on which to base educational programming decisions than measuring performance on a single occasion.

- **It utilizes transdisciplinary focus and language.**

The items were written using language common to all individuals involved in a student’s educational program. The assessment typically requires input from individuals with varying backgrounds, which facilitates sharing differing perspectives across disciplines and roles.

- **Criterion-referenced scales measure meaningful functional change.**

Criterion scores obtained for each part of the instrument indicate the student’s current place on the functional continuum, rather than the “distance from the norm.” The criterion scores describe the extent of the student’s participation in school activities, the need for assistance and adaptations in the school environment, and his or her current repertoire of educationally relevant functional skills.

- **Separate scales describe the student’s functional profile in specific performance areas.**

The test has separate scales to ensure that important areas of strength or limitation within a specific functional performance area can be identified and can be used to develop an appropriate educational program. This feature is especially useful when the student exhibits a variable pattern of functional limitations within a broad domain.

## Scores Reported

SFA is criterion-referenced rather than norm referenced. Results may be interpreted on a *basic level*, focusing on whether the student’s functioning in a particular area is outside the range typically seen

among his or her same grade regular education peers, and at an *advanced level*, examining the ratings of individual items and the criterion scores to identify and interpret patterns of functional performance.

# Basic Level Interpretation

The *criterion cut-off scores* were derived from the performance of students in the regular education population only. Five percent or fewer typically performing (regular education) students would be expected to have scores below these cut-off points. Thus, the criterion

cut-off scores can be used to establish the need for services when it must be demonstrated that the student's performance is below that expected for his or her grade.

# Advanced Level Interpretation

To develop the *criterion scores*, which were based on a population of students with disabilities, raw scores were converted to a criterion scale ranging from 0-100. A score of 100 represents a criterion of full grade-appropriate functioning in a particular area. Each criterion score represents a best estimate of the student's current position on the continuum of function, e.g., mobility, represented by the items of that

scale. Items that require relatively little of that quality or ability are at the low end of the continuum, while items that require substantially more of the quality are at the high end. Criterion scores are interpreted as a measure of the student's current functional performance relative to the overall continuum of participation, need for resources, or functional performance represented by that scale.

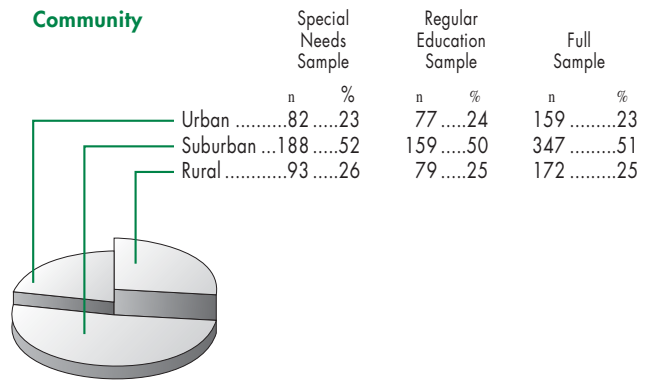
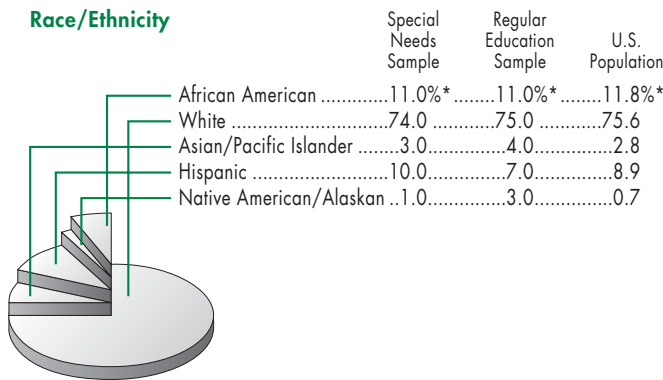
# Standardization

A sample of 678 students in two groups participated in the standardization of SFA. One group included students with special needs. These students had a variety of disabilities, including motor impairment, communication impairment, emotional or behavioral difficulties, and cognitive limitations. The second group represented students in regular education programs.

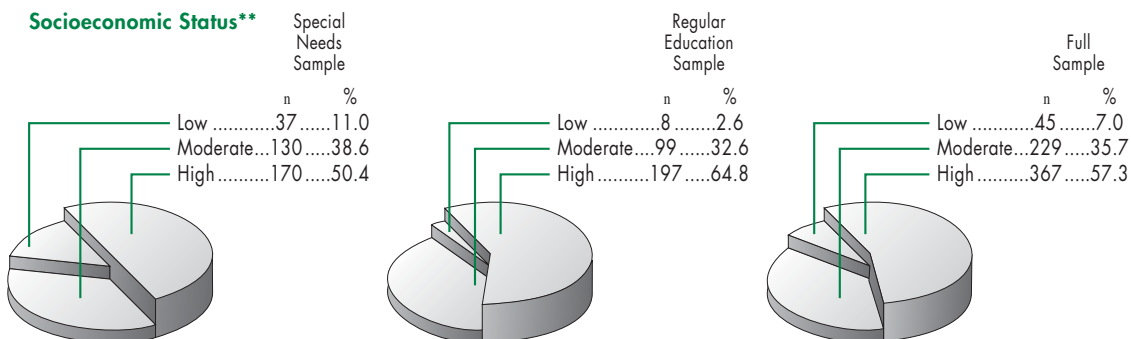
Over half (57%) were primarily attending a regular classroom, and 45% were placed in special classrooms with some degree of mainstreaming. Their parents had achieved 14.15 years of education as a mean average.

The standardization sample of 365 students with special needs included 66% boys and 34% girls from 112 sites in 40 states and Puerto Rico.

The sample of 315 students in regular education programs included 47% boys and 53% girls, and their parents had a mean average of 15.05 years of education.



\*1990 Census of Population, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Decimals rounded to the nearest whole percentage.



\*\*Based on information received from caregivers.

## SFA Standardization Sample by Grade

Grade	Special Needs Sample		Regular Education Sample		Full Sample	
	n	%*	n	%*	n	%*
Kindergarten .....	50	13.8	47	14.9	97	14.3
First grade .....	60	16.5	47	14.9	107	15.8
Second grade .....	48	13.2	44	14.0	92	13.6
Third grade .....	36	9.9	37	11.7	73	10.8
Fourth grade .....	60	16.5	56	17.8	116	17.1
Fifth grade .....	49	13.5	46	14.6	95	14.0
Sixth grade .....	20	5.5	35	11.1	55	8.1
Ungraded classrooms .....	36	9.9	0	0.0	36	5.3
Preschool/early intervention classroom ...	4	1.1	3	1.0	7	1.0

\* Decimals rounded to the nearest whole percentage.

## Validity

Validity studies examine the extent to which an instrument measures what it is designed to measure. Two content validity studies were conducted during the development of SFA. In the first study, conducted during the Pilot Study phase, evaluations from recognized experts in education and clinical services were obtained. A second study was

conducted with the Tryout Edition to obtain feedback from teachers and clinicians. The results indicated that the instrument was perceived to be both comprehensive and relevant for the population of students with disabilities in elementary schools.

## Summary

The *School Function Assessment* measures a student's performance of functional tasks required to participate in the academic and social aspects of an elementary school program. In addition to providing information about the student's current ability to participate successfully in the educational program, SFA also allows you to focus program planning on clear functional targets and

to collaborate with other professionals in making decisions about intervention. The scales provide a measure of the student's progress and document the effects of intervention. The scales also provide data on student resource needs that may be invaluable for budget decisions and to document support needed in each school program.

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