

Date: February 25, 2021

The purpose of this Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) guidance is to provide Texas school districts and open-enrollment charter schools with information related to the spring and summer 2021 state assessments, including the April, May, and June administrations of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®), the administration of STAAR Alternate 2, the administration of the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), and the administration of TELPAS Alternate.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) will continue to evaluate the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic across the state and provide additional guidance for 2021 state assessments, if needed. Although state assessments will not be used for state or federal accountability purposes for the 2020–2021 school year, the state assessments will provide equitable baseline data necessary to determine actual learning loss during the COVID-19 crisis and areas to address for the benefit of all Texas students.

GENERAL

Updated
2/25

1. What requirements exist regarding state assessments?

STAAR, STAAR Alternate 2, and TELPAS are required by state law to be offered by school systems. State law also requires that students take the assessments. (See Texas Education Code (TEC), Sections 39.023 and 39.027.)

Additionally, these assessments fulfill federal assessment and accountability requirement as established in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ESEA requires that students be assessed annually in grades 3–8, as well as once in high school, for certain subjects and requires that all English Learners (ELs) be assessed annually in English language proficiency. (See ESEA, Section 1111(b)(2)(B).) Updated federal assessment and accountability guidance released in February 2021 supports TEA’s current approach, including additional flexibility such as extended testing windows.

Please see the [State and Federal Required Tests Fact Sheet](#) for more information.

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2. What consequences are tied to state assessments for the 2020–2021 school year?

For school systems and campuses:

School systems and campuses must offer state assessments. Given the important academic information these assessments provide, school systems that offer remote instruction are required to take steps to encourage those students receiving remote instruction to participate in state assessments, including both adjustments to the testing environment for safety and outreach to parents of those students receiving remote instruction.

However, there are no statutory consequences for school systems or campuses based on students' performance on state assessments this year. For school systems and campuses, the A–F rating for the 2020–2021 school year has been paused. However, while accountability consequences for school systems have been paused for this school year, school systems may be subject to agency review if excessive absences for the assessment occur. More information on these policies is outlined in agency correspondence linked below:

- [A–F Ratings Paused](#)
- [Request for Federal Accountability Waiver](#)

Districts are required to provide accelerated instruction to any student who does not perform satisfactorily (i.e., achieves “Approaches Grade Level”) on a STAAR assessment. These requirements are included in the following sections of TEC: [28.0211](#), [28.0213](#), [28.0217](#), [29.081](#), and [39.025](#). The district must provide appropriate accelerated instruction as warranted for students who are absent or otherwise do not have valid assessment results. If a student has missed an assessment opportunity, the district may administer a local assessment, or an individual inventory, or other diagnostic assessment to determine accelerated instruction needs. The type of accelerated instruction is a local decision that should be based on individual student needs.

For students:

TEA has made some changes this year:

- TEA has [waived state requirements to retain students in grades 5 and 8 who do not meet grade level on the STAAR](#).
- [TEA has provided additional flexibility for English learners to be reclassified as English proficient](#).

For high school students, TEA is not lawfully authorized to waive graduation requirements. (See TEC, Section 7.056(e)(3)(B).) To meet assessment graduation requirements, students must have passed STAAR end-of-course (EOC) assessments (see TEC, Section 39.025(a)), scored high enough on a substitute assessment (e.g., SAT or ACT) (see TEC, Section 39.025), or met the requirements of an individual graduation committee (see TEC, Section 28.0258).

While this information is relevant to state requirements, there may be other potential requirements at the district or campus level.

There are likely negative academic consequences for those students unable to attend a safe proctored testing location given that neither the parent nor teachers working with the student will have access to state assessment results that provide an assessment of grade-level knowledge and skills or English language proficiency.

3. How long are the extended testing windows for spring and summer 2021?

STAAR: The online testing window is extended for both STAAR 3–8 assessments and STAAR end-of-course (EOC) assessments:

- five weeks for the April 2021 STAAR grades 3–8 and EOC assessments (April 6–May 7),
- five weeks for the May 2021 STAAR EOC assessments (May 4–June 4),
- five weeks for the May 2021 STAAR grades 3–8 assessments (May 11–June 11), and

- two weeks for the June 2021 STAAR EOC assessments (June 22–July 2).

TEA is not able to extend STAAR paper testing windows because of the time required to ship, process, and score paper testing materials and maintain reporting dates.

STAAR Alternate 2: The STAAR Alternate 2 testing window has been extended to include:

- a two-week preview window (March 15–26) and
- a six-week test administration window (March 29–May 7).

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TELPAS: The testing window for all TELPAS tests (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) has been extended to a 14-week window (February 22–May 28). Revised TELPAS reporting dates will be available soon.

TELPAS Alternate: The testing window for TELPAS Alternate has been extended to a 14-week window (February 22–May 28). Revised TELPAS Alternate reporting dates will be available soon.

4. How can a student who receives remote instruction be administered a STAAR, STAAR Alternate 2, TELPAS, or TELPAS Alternate assessment during the spring and summer 2021 administration windows?

STAAR, STAAR Alternate 2, TELPAS online assessments (grades 2–12 listening, speaking, and reading): To ensure equity for all students, a student must be present at a monitored testing session and must be supervised by a trained test administrator. Most administrations for the 2020–2021 school year have been extended to give districts more flexibility in scheduling assessments and more opportunity to test all eligible students. Districts should continue to follow appropriate public health protocols during any administration.

TELPAS holistic assessments (K–1 and 2–12 writing) and TELPAS Alternate: Teachers must provide multiple opportunities throughout the assessment window for students to demonstrate their level of English language proficiency. This can be done remotely as long as raters gather sufficient information to designate an accurate rating. If permitted, districts must determine locally if electronic tools (e.g., text, email, video conferencing software, etc.) will be allowed to complete the holistic rating process. Districts must ensure that the holistic rating process is valid and that FERPA regulations are maintained.

5. What type of testing sites are allowed for STAAR, STAAR Alternate 2, and TELPAS online assessments?

To accommodate testing while maintaining strong public health practices, districts may set up alternative testing sites other than the home campus (e.g., performing arts centers, recreational centers, hotels, other “learning centers” the district may have already established, or any other location supervised by a trained test administrator where the district can ensure equitable access and maintain test security). Remember that all test administration guidelines **MUST** still be followed:

- There must be at least one test administrator for every 30 students.
- Sufficient time to complete the test must be ensured for every student (especially for students receiving extra time accommodations).

- Sufficient bandwidth must be ensured for all students who are testing online.
- Answer documents should be grouped under the correct *Campus and Group Identification Sheets* to ensure test results are attributed to the home campus.

6. Who can be a test administrator for the Texas assessment program?

Any district personnel may serve as a test administrator if they hold valid education credentials (such as a Texas educator certificate or permit), or if they are supervised by a district professional who holds the appropriate credentials. All district and campus personnel who participate in state-mandated testing or handle or have access to secure test materials must be trained in proper testing procedures and have signed an *Oath of Test Security and Confidentiality*.

STAAR Alternate 2 and *TELPAS Alternate* test administrators must have a high level of familiarity with the student so that testing accommodations can be delivered appropriately and the student's typical mode of response can be understood.

7. How many testing opportunities during the STAAR, STAAR Alternate 2, and TELPAS online testing windows do I need to offer students?

Districts should plan their test administrations based on the allowed testing dates provided in the [TEA Testing Calendar](#). For students who do not test during the district scheduled assessment day, districts may offer additional testing days within the allowed testing window to ensure students have an opportunity to test. Additional testing days are optional and at the discretion of the district. However, districts should consider the potential impact of not having the assessment data to better understand how well students have mastered knowledge and skills in various grades and subjects. Districts should also consider the potential impact of missed test opportunities, specifically for assessments that are required for high school graduation. It remains critical that parents, educators, and policymakers have assessment data to understand the impact of the pandemic on student learning.

8. Can a student who is receiving homebound services participate in the spring or summer 2021 administrations?

Yes, just as with any other state administration, districts must make an attempt to test students who are receiving homebound services and instruction. If the student is unable to receive sufficient or consistent homebound services due to medical issues (this means that the student is currently receiving homebound services; however, the homebound teacher is unable to provide services for the majority of the documented time due to the medical issues), the student's test should be marked as followed for each program:

- *STAAR*: "A" for absent (the district may request a medical exclusion for its participation rate at the end of the testing window)
- *STAAR Alternate 2*: "M" for medical exception (this decision should have been made prior to attempting to administer the assessment and requires documentation in the student's individualized education program)
- *TELPAS*: "A" for absent for online tests and "E" for extenuating circumstances for holistic assessments

- *TELPAS Alternate*: “M” for medical exception (this decision should have been made prior to attempting to administer the assessment and requires documentation in the student’s individualized education program)

9. What do I do if a student who is receiving remote instruction does not participate in the spring 2021 administrations?

For any eligible student receiving remote instruction who does not go to the campus or designated testing site to take a STAAR, STAAR Alternate 2, or TELPAS online assessment in spring 2021, the district should indicate “O” for other in the SCORE CODE field and “0” under column D in the AGENCY USE field. Students who are scheduled to take EOC assessments for STAAR or STAAR Alternate 2 will be missing an opportunity to meet assessment graduation requirements.

10. What do I do if a student is required to quarantine during the district scheduled assessment day and is not able to test during the remainder of the testing window?

If a student is not able to take a STAAR, STAAR Alternate 2, TELPAS, or TELPAS Alternate assessment during the allowable testing window due to COVID-19 quarantine, then the student's test should be marked "A" for absent. There are extended testing windows this year to help reduce the likelihood that this situation occurs. For *TELPAS Alternate*, this would mean a student is not able to complete all 40 Observable Behaviors. For *STAAR* assessments only, the district may request a medical exclusion (for the district participation rate) at the end of the testing window.

11. I want to ensure social distancing on campuses during test administration, and as such believe I need to reduce the total number of students on campuses on scheduled testing days. Does my district have the ability to require students who are not scheduled to take an assessment to learn remotely on testing days?

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For specific assessments, including *STAAR*, *TELPAS online* assessments, and certain college readiness assessments (SAT, PSAT, ACT, ACT Aspire, and TSIA), if a district cannot assess all students during the district-scheduled assessment days and comply with local health protocols, the district can submit a waiver to require students who are not scheduled to take that assessment to learn remotely on a scheduled testing day. Districts should use other flexibility (e.g., extended windows) to ensure that this impacts the minimum number of students possible. Districts should have a communication plan in place to encourage as many students who are normally remote as possible to participate in the assessment.

For students in grades 9–12, school systems already have access to this flexibility through the [40% Campus Hybrid Instruction for 9th–12th Grade Students Waiver](#). For students in kindergarten through grade 8, school systems may apply for the [Hybrid Instruction During District-Scheduled Testing Days for K–8th Grade Students Waiver](#). These waivers are intended to allow school systems to establish a less-than-daily on-campus attendance schedule as the sole offering for students in one or more campuses of the district in order to reduce the number of individuals on a campus at any one time and increase the total number of students served in an on-campus setting in the district on testing days. For *STAAR*, this waiver should be limited to 10 days across the April and May *STAAR* administrations. For all other assessments, this should be limited to a maximum of five days per administration. All waivers will be conditionally approved upon receipt but may be

subject to further review by TEA. In the event one of these testing days has already occurred, waivers can be submitted now and approvals can be granted retroactively.

This does not apply to *STAAR Alternate 2* or *TELPAS Alternate*, which already have long testing windows and involve individualized administration protocols.

SPRING AND SUMMER 2021 STAAR ADMINISTRATIONS

12. Will there be a STAAR testing window extension for students who do not have the option to test online due to a particular accommodation needed?

Yes, students who cannot access the STAAR online test because of a required accommodation (e.g., a Braille administration or an approved paper administration of STAAR with embedded supports) may also receive the flexibility associated with the testing window extension. Contact the testing vendor regarding return dates for scoreable materials for these cases.

13. What do I do if my district cannot follow the current TEA one-day STAAR paper administration schedule and follow appropriate public health protocols?

If a district cannot follow the current one-day paper administration for STAAR while following appropriate public health protocols, then the district will need to administer some of these assessments online during the extended testing window.

SPRING 2021 TELPAS ADMINISTRATION

14. Can the online basic training be completed in a remote setting?

Yes, the online basic training may be completed in a remote setting and should be completed independently. Completion of the online basic training is required for new raters and for raters who have not completed calibration activities within the last three years. This course is divided into modules so that it can be completed in more than one sitting, if necessary.

15. Can TELPAS raters calibrate from home?

Yes, due to the state's current health situation, the agency is allowing districts the option to conduct monitored calibration activities in a virtual or remote setting (e.g., Zoom, TEAMS meeting, Google Meet, etc.). Calibration must still be completed in one sitting and be monitored by a proctor.

A district, at their discretion, may require face-to-face monitored calibration activities. However, they must still adhere to appropriate public health protocols. Individuals are not authorized to serve as TELPAS raters until they complete the state-required training and calibration activities.

16. How should calibration activities conducted in a remote setting be monitored?

Calibration proctors must be able to view all participants in a session on one screen as they complete their calibration activity. Participants should remain in the proctor’s view at all times. A calibration proctor may not have a session with breakout groups and should not need to scroll to see all the participants at one time. In addition, the chat or message feature should be disabled since raters are required to calibrate independently.

Consider the following if you plan to allow remote calibration:

- Before participating in a calibration session, ensure that participants have logged in to their Online Training Center account and have updated their profile (district, email address, etc.).
- Schedule calibration sessions and notify educators of date and time.
- Have rosters readily available for each session.
- Take attendance to keep track of participants.
- Ensure that the chat or message feature for remote, monitored calibration sessions have been disabled.
- Advise raters that K–1 and 2–12 listening and speaking modules may have audio clips and they will need to mute their microphones during training to not disturb others.
- Raters should only have the remote platform (e.g., Zoom, TEAMS meeting, Google Meet, etc.), the Online Training Center, and the rater manual open on their computers as they calibrate.
- Raters should have access to the applicable proficiency level descriptors (PLDs), either from the electronic rater manual or as a hard copy.
- Remind educators that rater calibration must be done individually to ensure that raters are able to apply the PLDs accurately and consistently. Any notes taken during the calibration activity must be destroyed immediately after the session.

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17. Can TELPAS writing samples be collected for students who are receiving remote instruction?

Yes, writing samples should reflect authentic classroom instruction, including remote learning in the current environment; therefore, writing samples may be typed or handwritten. Teachers assembling writing samples should select writing samples that are reflective of the student’s current level of proficiency. Writing samples in which students relied heavily on a dictionary or thesaurus or used editing tools (e.g., spell check, spell prediction, or grammar check) should not be used. Writing samples should not be collected for the sole purpose of assembling TELPAS writing collections. Districts must ensure that the holistic rating process is valid and that FERPA regulations are maintained. As a reminder, it is a requirement for writing collections to be complete. If a student has an incomplete writing collection towards the end of the assessment window, contact the Student Assessment Division for guidance.