

March 21, 2017

To the Administrator Addressed:

SUBJECT: 2017 Spring STAAR Administration

I am so thankful for the intensive efforts you and your staff have been engaged in all year, working to teach our next generation so they are equipped with all they need to know at each grade level. Next week marks one more step in that process, as the first of the spring 2017 STAAR assessments will be administered to assess the depth of grade level knowledge students have learned. I know this can be stressful. I've been listening to district feedback and want to do all I can to help make this a positive experience, and to reduce stress for students and district personnel. To that end, I wanted to highlight three recent changes:

Time to Test

I've heard concerns voiced about the nature of the test environment, where students are made to sit quietly after they've finished their tests, in some cases for over an hour. As previously announced, the STAAR assessments have been shortened so that the vast majority of students will be able to complete the assessment within **two hours in grades 3–5** and within **three hours in grades 6–8**. We have recently changed rules so that districts will only be asked to indicate on the student's answer document any student in grades 3–5 who takes more than 2 hours to complete the test or any student in grades 6–8 who takes more than 3 hours to complete the test. I want to encourage districts to allow students to leave the testing environment after they complete the test, or perhaps otherwise organize test administration so that only those students who need more time remain in a testing environment.

Medical Exemptions

I've also heard concerns voiced in support of our most truly fragile students. In some cases, administrators feel required to deliver the STAAR Alternate 2 assessment even for students who likely should not take any form of assessment. To address this, we have recently attempted to clarify the availability of assessment medical exemptions. For those students who are receiving extensive medical treatment due to a medical emergency or other serious issue, districts are encouraged to call the Student Assessment Division to discuss testing options and to relieve additional undue stress on the student.

Classroom Displays During Testing

Finally, I've heard concerns from many about requirements related to covering classroom displays during testing that can seem to transform otherwise vibrant classrooms into very sterile, stressful testing environments. So, we have changed our rules to relax some of these requirements. To assist you next week, my staff has provided examples to clarify information about removing or covering instructional displays prior to testing. Materials that clearly answer questions should be covered. But if in your judgment they won't provide answers to possible questions, they certainly don't need to be covered. For example, it's hard to imagine the visibility of a word wall helping a student answer a question, and so there's no need to cover them. But a listing of literary terms with their definitions potentially could help a child answer a question. Regardless, we want you to use your judgment, and don't see a need to err on the side of sterility.

Hopefully these changes are helpful to your students and staff. I want to thank you all for the hard work that you do. I hope next week's testing administration goes well for each and every one of you. If you need assistance with anything, please call TEA's Student Assessment Division at (512) 463-9536, and that team will be happy to help you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Morath', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mike Morath
Commissioner of Education