

**SUBJECT: Important Changes to the Texas Assessment Program in the 2014–2015 School Year**

August 29, 2014

**To the Administrator Addressed:**

The purpose of this email is to provide information about important changes to the Texas assessment program in the 2014–2015 school year.

**STAAR PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

As previously announced in the August 21, 2014 communication from the Commissioner of Education, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will be maintaining the initial performance standards for the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) program for the 2014–2015 school year given the number of changes impacting the STAAR program during this time. In addition, TEA will be proposing, through commissioner of education rules, changes to the existing plan to phase in performance standards for the STAAR program. The existing plan is being adjusted from two steps to three steps to allow for smaller incremental movements toward the final performance standards. The new performance standards for the second phase-in and the newly established third phase-in can be found on the student assessment webpage at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/staar/performance-standards/>.

**STAAR TESTING REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCELERATED STUDENTS**

Beginning in the 2014–2015 school year, there is a significant change regarding student eligibility for STAAR. Students should be administered the STAAR assessments that align to the level of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) instruction that they are receiving regardless of their enrolled grade level. For example, a student enrolled in grade 7 who is receiving instruction in grade 8 science would be required to take the STAAR grade 8 science test. TEA understands that it is in the best interest of students to be assessed over content at the time they are receiving instruction in that content. More information regarding how this change affects test administration materials will be provided later in fall 2014.

In addition, TEA has now received written notification from the United States Department of Education denying the agency's waiver request submitted January 27, 2014. The purpose in requesting an amendment to the approved Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility waiver was to avoid double-testing accelerated middle school students taking Algebra I. TEA is considering options regarding the testing requirements for these accelerated mathematics students, state and federal accountability, and performance-based monitoring for the 2014–2015 school year. The agency will share additional information as soon as it is available.

**STAAR GRADES 3–8 MATHEMATICS**

Revised TEKS in mathematics were adopted by the State Board of Education (SBOE) in April 2012. In the 2014–2015 school year, the revised TEKS for K–8 will be implemented in

classroom instruction and therefore in the STAAR mathematics assessments at grades 3–8. Based on the revisions to the TEKS and, subsequently, to the STAAR assessments, new performance standards for STAAR grades 3–8 mathematics will be set in summer 2015. Students who participate in the spring 2015 STAAR grades 3–8 mathematics administrations will receive a raw score prior to the end of the school year. Once new performance standards are approved, they will be retroactively applied to students' test results from the spring 2015 administrations. New reports and data files will be sent to school districts in August 2015.

Due to the timing of setting new performance standards for STAAR 3–8 mathematics, Student Success Initiative (SSI) retest opportunities for STAAR mathematics at grades 5 and 8 will not be offered in 2015. For the 2014–2015 school year, districts will use other relevant academic information to make promotion/retention decisions for mathematics. Please note that SSI will still be in effect for reading in 2014–2015.

Since the new performance standards for grades 3–8 mathematics will not be determined prior to the release of the state accountability ratings, the 2015 state and federal accountability results will not be based on the new standards. For accountability purposes only, the state plans to establish a link between the spring 2015 STAAR grades 3–8 mathematics tests and the previous mathematics tests to determine equivalent performance standards. The 2015 state and federal accountability results will be based on student performance on the 2015 assessments at each equivalent passing standard. Use of these equivalencies will allow for the inclusion of grades 3–8 mathematics results in the accountability system, as required by statute, and will also allow the agency to meet the current deadlines specified in state law for issuing state accountability ratings.

### **STAAR FIELD-TESTING ACTIVITIES**

Beginning in spring 2015, the field-test prompts will be removed from the operational grade 7, English I, and English II tests and will be field-tested in a separate prompt study that will be administered every three years beginning in 2017. An additional prompt study for grade 4 (both English and Spanish) will also be conducted on this same schedule.

The prompt study at grade 7 is being initiated to minimize the field-test burden on students during the operational administration so that students are required to write only two compositions during the two-day assessment rather than three. The prompt studies are being initiated for English I and II because reading and writing were combined in spring 2014, and writing two essays in the five-hour time frame proved challenging for some students. Removing the field-test prompts from these assessments will make the tests more manageable, especially for students who struggle in writing, and may allow more students to demonstrate their best writing performance.

### **STAAR STANDARDIZED ORAL ADMINISTRATION**

Standardized oral administration (SOA) for the STAAR program, an online option for oral administration, will be expanded in the 2014–2015 school year to include grade 5 science and grade 6 reading and mathematics assessments. Districts will be able to test students using SOA for STAAR in the following grades and subjects:

- grade 4 reading and mathematics
- grade 5 science
- grade 6 reading and mathematics
- grade 7 reading and mathematics
- grade 8 science and social studies

Information about SOA is available on the Student Assessment website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/SOA/>. This information includes the student tutorial for SOA as well as some released STAAR test forms.

### **STAAR ESSAYS AND SHORT ANSWER RESPONSES**

For the March 2015 STAAR administrations, images of the grades 4 and 7 compositions and English I and English II essays and short answer responses will be provided to districts at no charge following the administration of those assessments. The release of the images at no cost is being done to support writing and reading instruction and to help educators target instructional intervention.

### **STAAR A**

TEA is developing an online accommodated version of STAAR called STAAR A. This accommodated version of the general STAAR assessment will provide embedded supports designed to help students with disabilities access the content being assessed. These embedded supports include visual aids, graphic organizers, clarifications of construct-irrelevant terms, and text-to-speech functionality. STAAR A will be available beginning in spring 2015 for students that meet eligibility requirements.

Specific information about STAAR A will be posted to the Student Assessment website in fall 2014. This information will include eligibility requirements and student tutorials as well as training resources.

### **STAAR ALTERNATE 2**

House Bill 5, passed by the 83<sup>rd</sup> Texas Legislature in May 2013, required a redesign of STAAR Alternate. The redesigned assessment is known as STAAR Alternate 2 and is a standardized item-based assessment administered to students in a one-on-one setting. Participating students will respond to questions provided in a test booklet, and answers will be submitted by the test administrator in an online form. The first administration of the redesigned STAAR Alternate 2 assessment will be in February 2015. New performance standards will be set in spring 2015, and STAAR Alternate 2 results will be reported with STAAR results.

### **RELEASE TEST PLAN FOR THE STAAR PROGRAM**

Due to both a substantive revision to the mathematics TEKS in grades 3–8 and the development of new assessments (STAAR A and STAAR Alternate 2) for students receiving special education services, the agency's ability to release test questions varies across the STAAR program, particularly in 2014–2015. The following is the release schedule for 2014–2015 that accounts for the revisions to the mathematics TEKS, the development of STAAR A, and the redesign of STAAR Alternate.

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>STAAR General Assessments and STAAR Spanish</b>	<b>STAAR 3–8 Mathematics</b>	<b>STAAR A</b>	<b>STAAR Alternate 2</b>
2014–2015	Full Release*	Partial Release**	No Release	No Release
2015–2016	Full Release	Full Release	Full Release	Full Release

\* Full Release is an intact test form that represents the entire test blueprint.

\*\* Partial Release is a subset of test questions that are eligible for assessment at a given grade and, therefore, do not represent the entire test blueprint.

### **PROGRESS MEASURES FOR THE STAAR PROGRAM**

Changes to various aspects of the STAAR program affect the agency's ability to report student progress on the assessments. The list below outlines adjustments to the STAAR progress measures reported for the 2014–2015 school year.

- Students will not receive a STAAR progress measure for mathematics in grades 4–8.
- A STAAR progress measure will be reported for the first time for grade 7 writing.
- A STAAR progress measure will be reported for eligible STAAR A students who took STAAR or STAAR L in 2013–2014.
- Students will not receive a STAAR Alternate 2 progress measure.

### **TAKS**

Beginning in October 2014, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) will be administered online. Districts will receive a revised TAKS manual in fall 2014 that reflects the online administration. This manual is intended for use during all future TAKS administrations; therefore, it will no longer be printed and shipped after fall 2014. The TAKS manual will continue to be accessible online.

Beginning in the 2014–2015 school year, TAKS will be administered three times per year—October, March, and July.

### **TESTING IRREGULARITY INCIDENT REPORT AUDIT**

In spring 2014, district testing coordinators were required to submit a Plan of Action with their online incident reports and specify the steps that would be taken by the district or campus to prevent a reported testing irregularity from reoccurring. In fall 2014, information from a sample of district reports will be used in an audit to verify that corrective actions have been designed or implemented in response to the reported irregularity.

If you have any questions or need additional information about these 2014–2015 assessment activities, please call the Student Assessment Division at 512-463-9536.

### **Assessment Contact Information**

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