

Request for Applications: the 2016-2018 Writing Pilot Program

June 10, 2016

Pursuant to House Bill (HB) 1164¹, 2015 Texas Legislature, this is to notify education service centers (ESCs) and Texas school districts that the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is now accepting applications by ESCs for the writing pilot study program described below. For consideration, an application must be received no later than July 11, 2016.

Applications can be sent to the following address:

Texas Education Agency
Student Assessment Division, 3-122
ATTN: Brad Vasil, Director of Reading, Writing, and Social Studies Assessments
1701 N. Congress
Austin, TX 78701

The 2016-2018 Writing Pilot Program

During the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years, TEA and Educational Testing Service (ETS) will conduct a writing pilot program to determine whether and how Texas students' writing skills can be assessed using a locally supervised approach that yields reliable and valid scores for use in accountability. Currently, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR[®]) program assesses student writing skills in grades 4 and 7, and on the English I and II end-of-course (EOC) tests.

The pilot study will include the collection and scoring of a range of student writing samples throughout the school year. Students will compose the following writing samples:

- An initial timed writing sample based on a specific writing prompt chosen by the student from a selection of writing prompts generated through a collaborative design process, inclusive of teachers, Education Service Centers (ESCs), and institutes of higher education. This initial sample will be collected at the beginning of the school year;
- A portfolio of three compositions to demonstrate each student's skill in writing to three additional genres (e.g., personal narrative, persuasive, and expository); and
- A final timed writing product, written near the end of the school year, designed to produce a growth measure. All writing samples will be written in English.

The writing program's design and methodology can be found at www.tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/writing_pilot_study.pdf. It is expected that up to 12

¹ Enrolled HB 1164 may be viewed at <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/84R/billtext/html/HB01164F.htm>

school districts will be selected, and approximately **500** students per grade or subject will participate in the pilot study.

In addition to classroom teacher scoring and trained rater scoring, some participating districts will be using a cloud-based digital platform with the capability of scoring student timed writing samples.

To confirm the reliability of local and machine scoring, a percentage of writing samples will also be scored by TEA and ETS. Throughout the pilot study, TEA and ETS will provide procedures for the collection and submission of these student writing samples.

At the high school level, participating students will still be required to take the STAAR English I and English II assessments for graduation purposes. Participating students in grades 4 and 7 will not be administered the STAAR grades 4 and 7 writing assessments.

Requirements for Application

Each ESC is expected to coordinate its own application process.

To apply for participation in the 2016-2018 writing pilot program study, an ESC must propose one to three partnering local school districts it serves and at least one local university partner. ESC, district, and institution of higher education (IHE) participation in the pilot study will extend over the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years.

Between June and July 2016, TEA anticipates selecting one or more ESCs for the writing pilot program. TEA and ETS will evaluate applications, ensuring that key Texas demographic and geographic characteristics are represented by the selected ESCs and the partner school districts.

ESC Required Evidence for Application

An applying ESC must include the following in its application: identification of up to three partnering school districts for the pilot study and evidence that these school districts agree to participate in the writing pilot program for the duration of the study; identification and proof of cooperation of an IHE partner to provide assistance in training for local scoring of writing samples; and evidence that the ESC can host TEA-sponsored training for the writing pilot program.

Partnering School Districts

An ESC's application must identify up to three partnering districts in its service region, and the number of students by district for each grade or subject that will participate in the pilot study. A

district can propose to participate in the pilot study for one or more grades or courses. Selected districts will be expected to:

- a. participate in the pilot study for both the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years in the grades and courses specified in the application;
- b. select appropriate reading/writing teachers and students to participate in the pilot;
- c. maintain student writing samples and any other necessary material; and
- d. participate in all required ESC-sponsored training for scoring essays using materials provided by TEA.

An ESC must include evidence in its application that the partnering districts understand and can meet the above requirements. Additionally, since the writing pilot program must reflect the state's diverse demographics and geography, the application must illustrate the demographic composition of the proposed participating schools and whether each school is rural, medium-sized suburban, or large urban.

The ESC application should identify the teachers who will be involved in either the implementation or scoring of the writing pilot program by grade and course. The application must also include a letter of commitment from the superintendent of each participating school district.

Partnering IHE

In its application, an ESC is expected to provide evidence that it has obtained a commitment from a Texas institution of higher education to provide writing instructional/assessment expertise for the writing pilot program. Participating institutions of higher education will be responsible for providing assistance in scoring and evaluating student writing samples. An ESC's application will demonstrate that:

- a. the institution of higher education (IHE) will participate for both the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years;
- b. the IHE understands its role will include, in consultation with the ESC's participating districts and TEA, assistance in scoring and evaluating student writing samples; and
- c. IHE staff involved in the writing pilot program will attend all required TEA-sponsored training related to the pilot study.

An application must provide the name and a description of the IHE(s). TEA will accept a letter of commitment from an executive or administrative officer employed by the IHE as evidence of an IHE's willingness to participate. Such a letter should include the contact information of the executive/administrative officer, the title of the officer, and a list of resources, including staff, that the IHE can provide to the ESC and participating districts in the execution of the writing pilot program.

ESC Hosting TEA-Sponsored Training

A selected ESC is expected to work in close collaboration with TEA and ETS in all aspects of the pilot study. During the course of the pilot study, selected ESCs may need to provide lodging and travel for at least four local educators at each participating grade or course level for all TEA-sponsored training. ESCs will also provide training for the collection and scoring of student writing samples and essays to participating educators and IHE staff. Specific activities will include:

- summer 2016 – a participating ESC will work with TEA and that region’s designated IHE to develop rubrics for the evaluation of student writing samples;
- summer 2016 and 2017 – a participating ESC will host a one day workshop for participating district educators and higher education faculty on the use of materials provided by TEA to collect and evaluate student writing samples;
- September/October 2016 and 2017 – a participating ESC will work with TEA, the designated IHE, and the participating writing teachers to review/score the initial writing samples collected from students;
- May/June 2017 and 2018 -- in the final month of each school year, a participating ESC will work with TEA, the designated IHE, and the participating writing teachers to score the final student writing products. The ESCs will also collect and organize student portfolios of writing samples for local evaluation by participating teachers and IHE staff, as well as for score verification by TEA.

An application should describe the districts an ESC serves (rural, medium-sized suburban, and/or large urban school; and demographic composition of those districts) and the ways in which the ESC currently collaborates with elementary and secondary teachers in the applicable subject areas. Additionally, an ESC’s application should illustrate any other current collaboration with local IHEs or other organizations.

Program Funding

The writing pilot program is funded through the state assessment program contract. Participating ESCs, districts, and IHEs will be compensated for program activities by ETS as the state assessment contractor for the writing pilot program.

Evaluation

TEA and ETS will evaluate each application. To ensure consideration, an application must show evidence to support all requirements described under ESC Required Evidence for Application to Participate.

Upon review and evaluation, TEA will contact each applying ESC with its determination.