

## Chapter 4

# Plans for the Development and Implementation of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) Modified and STAAR Alternate for Eligible Students Receiving Special Education Services

The Texas student assessment program includes as many students as possible in the general assessments while providing options for alternate assessments for eligible students receiving special education services whose academic achievement and progress cannot be measured appropriately with the general assessments. The STAAR program is designed to measure the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in more rigorous ways, and STAAR assessments are being developed using three major design attributes: focus, clarity, and depth. The alternate assessments for eligible students who receive special education services, including STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate, will reflect the general STAAR program.

### **STAAR Modified**

#### ***Differences Between the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills–Modified (TAKS–M) and STAAR Modified***

TAKS–Modified (TAKS–M) was first operational in spring 2008 and was approved by the United States Department of Education (USDE) in June 2009. This assessment is designed for eligible students receiving special education services who can make academic progress even though they may not reach grade-level achievement standards in the same time frame as their non-disabled peers. These are students who have a disability that significantly affects academic progress in the grade-level curriculum and that precludes achievement of grade-level proficiency within a school year. TAKS–M was designed to more accurately measure these students’ knowledge and skills against grade-level content standards and has separate achievement standards set by the commissioner of education based on the recommendation of a standard-setting panel made up of educators who work with both general and special education students. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) chose to modify the TAKS assessments to provide appropriate access to the general assessment while meeting the instructional needs of this group of students. Each TAKS–M test covers the same grade-level content as TAKS, but TAKS–M tests have been changed in format (larger font, fewer items per page, etc.) and test design (fewer answer choices, simpler vocabulary and sentence structure, etc.). These students may need modifications to instruction and assessments to effectively demonstrate their knowledge of the grade-level content standards.

As with the current modified assessments, the STAAR Modified assessments will cover the same content as the general STAAR assessments but will be modified in format and test design. STAAR Modified assessments will be developed for all content areas for grades 3–8 that are part of the general STAAR program and for nine of the twelve STAAR EOC assessments (English I, II, III, Algebra I,

geometry, biology, world geography, world history, and U.S. history). Modified assessments are not being developed for Algebra II, chemistry, or physics as these courses are not required on the Minimum High School Program (MHSP) and all students taking STAAR Modified assessments are on the MHSP because they are receiving modified instruction.

The new STAAR Modified assessments will reflect the same increased rigor and focus of the general assessments and now will include more rigorous item types. The tests will differ from the current TAKS–M assessment in the following ways:

- Students will be required to respond to writing tasks using first-person essay, literary, expository, or persuasive modes, rather than using self-selected writing approaches or combining approaches to respond to a writing task.
- Field-test items will be embedded in the modified assessments, rather than being included in stand-alone field tests every three years.
- Performance standards will be set using available empirical data to link performance across specific grades within a subject and across courses. Additional empirical data will be collected and analyzed to provide information for the standards review process in future years.
- Performance standards will be reviewed at least once every three years and, if necessary, adjusted to ensure the assessments maintain a high level of rigor.

The STAAR Modified EOC assessments will differ from the TAKS–M high school assessments in that each EOC assessment will cover only the content from a particular course (for example, Algebra I will assess only Algebra I content) rather than content from multiple courses (for example, Algebra I and grade 8 mathematics), allowing for a more relevant and focused assessment that is aligned to the course content for which the student is enrolled.

## ***STAAR Modified Implementation Policies***

### **Embedded Field-Test Items and Field Tests**

TAKS–M stand-alone field tests were administered in fall 2007, spring 2008, and fall 2009. With the STAAR program, a significant reduction in the amount of stand-alone field-testing is planned, beginning with the 2011–2012 school year. The first administrations of the STAAR Modified assessments will field-test items in a special spring administration rather than in stand-alone field tests. This spring administration will serve two purposes. The first is that items will be field-tested to determine if they are suitable for use on future tests. After that determination is made, a student will receive a test score. This approach is different from a stand-alone field test, in which no scores are reported and a determination is made about how well an item is performing before it is placed on an operational assessment.

Spring assessments are scheduled to occur for the following subjects and grades in 2012:

- all subjects assessed at grades 3–8
- English I, Algebra I, biology, and world geography (those courses typically taken by students enrolled in grade 9)

### Stand-Alone Field Tests

In 2011–2012, STAAR Modified stand-alone field tests will be conducted only for English II and geometry, courses that are typically taken in grade 10. These tests will be administered at the same time as the other EOC tests. Students will not receive a test score for either English II or geometry after this administration, but the field-test data will be used to determine which items to place on the 2013 operational test and be used to set standards. Standards for these tests will be set at the same time as the standards are set for the four STAAR Modified EOC assessments being administered in spring 2012. This will allow on-time reporting of student scores for these two assessments after the 2012–2013 administration.

TEA proposes to follow the field-test plan described in the table below for the STAAR Modified assessments. The following table indicates the assessments that will have embedded field-test items and that will be administered as spring administrations. For more information regarding field testing for the general STAAR program, see Chapter 1.

### Field-Testing Plan for STAAR Modified Assessments

Year	Activities		
	Embedded Field Tests	Spring Administrations	Traditional Stand-alone Field Tests
2011–2012	Not Applicable	STAAR Modified grades 3–8* (17 tests: all grades and subjects) STAAR Modified EOC* (4 tests: Algebra I, biology, world geography, and English I)	STAAR Modified EOC* (2 tests: English II and geometry)
2012–2013	STAAR Modified grades 3–8 (17 tests) STAAR Modified EOC (6 tests)	STAAR Modified EOC* (1 test: world history)	Not Applicable
2013–2014	STAAR Modified grades 3–8 (17 tests) STAAR Modified EOC (7 tests)	STAAR Modified EOC * (2 tests: U.S. history and English III)	Not Applicable
2014–2015	STAAR Modified grades 3–8 (17 tests) STAAR Modified EOC (9 tests)	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

\* Field tests for the modified assessments will be administered at the same time in the spring as the general STAAR assessments.

## **STAAR Modified Test Administrations**

### **Testing Opportunities for STAAR Modified EOC Assessments**

Once all nine STAAR Modified EOC assessments are operational in spring 2015, they will be administered two times per year. There will be an administration in the fall semester for students who complete courses at that time and an administration in the spring semester. STAAR Modified EOC assessments will be administered only two times a year because satisfactory performance on these assessments is not required for graduation; therefore, there is less need for retest opportunities than there is for the general assessments. Admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committees determine graduation requirements for students receiving special education services.

### **Substitute Courses**

Because of the move from grade-based TAKS assessments to course-based STAAR assessments in high school, a policy change was needed to address the previous policy allowing substitute courses at the high school level for students receiving special education services. Under the previous policy, some students receiving special education services could take locally developed courses that counted for credit toward completion of the requirements for the MHSP if an ARD committee determined that the state-approved course was not appropriate. These locally developed courses were not required to be aligned to the TEKS for the state-required courses. To be in compliance with federal law, all students must participate in the assessment system; therefore, without this change in policy regarding locally developed courses, students at the high school level would likely be assessed on curriculum to which they may not have sufficient access.

To address this issue, commissioner's rules are being amended to define testing requirements for students receiving special education services who take locally developed substitute courses for those listed on the MHSP. Districts will be allowed to continue providing locally developed substitute courses for some students receiving special education services for the courses listed on the MHSP. However, the content of the locally developed substitute course must be fully aligned to the TEKS for the course it replaces. Students will be required to participate in an EOC assessment (general, modified, or alternate) for the course that has been substituted. See Chapter 7 for graduation course requirements.

### **Fifteen Percent of Grade and Cumulative Score**

When addressing cumulative and minimum score requirements or the requirement that districts count the score a student received on an EOC assessment as 15% of the student's final course grade, current legislation does not provide requirements for students taking a modified or alternate assessment. TEA recommends the following:

The purpose of the cumulative score for the general assessment is to allow students to have some flexibility in how they meet their testing requirements for graduation. For students taking a modified or alternate assessment, the ARD committee already provides flexibility by establishing the testing and graduation requirements on an individual basis. TEA recommends that the cumulative score be reported

only for students receiving special education services who take one or more general assessments, not for the modified or alternate assessments.

The STAAR Modified EOC assessments could, however, be included as 15% of the student's course grade. For more information regarding the 15% and cumulative score calculations for the general STAAR EOC program, see Chapter 7.

### ***STAAR Modified Test Design***

Test specifications provide the underlying structure for the assessments, supporting how the assessments will be designed, constructed, administered, and scored. Each STAAR Modified assessment consists primarily of multiple-choice questions addressing the content of the assessed curriculum for the grade-level subject. Item modification guidelines specify how to modify test questions from the general assessment in a way that preserves the integrity of the knowledge or skill being assessed.

Blueprints delineate the set of reporting categories and corresponding student expectations to be measured on an assessment as well as the number of items to be tested for each reporting category. The STAAR Modified assessments are based on the general STAAR blueprints and reflect that the students taking STAAR Modified are assessed on the same grade-level curriculum as general education students. The number of items on the STAAR Modified blueprints will be decreased proportionally by approximately 20% for each reporting category. After the proportional reduction of the blueprints, the STAAR Modified assessments will reflect the similar percentages of readiness and supporting student expectations as the STAAR assessments. The STAAR Modified blueprints are currently being developed, and will be posted to the TEA website when they are completed at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/staar/>.

## **STAAR Alternate**

### ***Differences Between TAKS–Alternate (TAKS–Alt) and STAAR Alternate***

To assess students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, TEA developed TAKS–Alt, a teacher-based observation assessment that fully meets the statutory and regulatory requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The current TAKS–Alt is based on alternate academic achievement standards and is designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities receiving special education services who meet the participation requirements for the program. This assessment is not a traditional paper or multiple-choice test. Instead, it requires teachers to observe students as they complete state-developed assessment tasks linked to the grade-level TEKS. Teachers then evaluate student performance based on the dimensions of the TAKS–Alt rubric and submit results through an online instrument. This assessment can be administered using any language or other communication method routinely used with the student.

As part of the alternate assessment process, teachers observe students as they perform standardized tasks linked to the grade-level TEKS and that measure student progress on skills aligned with the academic grade-level content standards. Teachers record observation notes during the assessment on state-developed data collection forms. Teachers evaluate students' performance by recording whether the student demonstrated the skill and noting the level of support needed to perform the skill. Teachers then enter information about the student's performance by answering a series of evaluation questions in the TAKS–Alt online testing interface. The TAKS–Alt rubric provides an overview of how scores are applied by the automated scoring feature of the online system.

The STAAR Alternate assessments will be very similar in design to the current TAKS–Alt assessment. Students will continue to perform standardized assessment tasks linked to the grade-level TEKS that measure student progress on skills aligned with the academic grade-level content standards. However, STAAR Alternate will incorporate a vertical alignment in the program's assessment tasks, and the high school assessments will move from grade-level assessments to course-based assessments. The new STAAR Alternate assessments will reflect the same increased rigor and focus of the general and modified assessments. STAAR Alternate high school assessments will be developed for courses included on the MHSP: Algebra I; geometry; English I, II, and III; biology; U.S. history; world geography; and world history. In addition, performance standards will be set so that they require a higher level of student performance than is required on the current TAKS–Alt assessments. See the following for timelines for the implementation of STAAR Alternate.

### Transition Plan for STAAR Alternate

School Year	STAAR Alternate Activities
2010–2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final administration of current TAKS–Alt tests for grades 3–8</li> <li>• Final administration of current TAKS–Alt tests for grade 9</li> </ul>
2011–2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final administration of current TAKS–Alt tests for grade 10</li> <li>• First administration of STAAR Alternate grades 3–8 for reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies</li> <li>• First administration of STAAR Alternate English I, Algebra I, biology, and world geography</li> </ul>
2012–2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final administration of current TAKS–Alt tests for grade 11</li> <li>• First administration of STAAR Alternate English II, geometry, and world history</li> </ul>
2013–2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First administration of STAAR Alternate English III and U.S. history</li> </ul>

### Test Design

Many of the current TAKS–Alt policies and procedures will remain in place as the transition is made to STAAR Alternate. Existing TAKS–Alt assessment tasks will be reviewed based on vertical alignment, and tasks that meet alignment for the STAAR Alternate will be maintained in the STAAR Alternate item bank. Assessment tasks that do not meet alignment for the STAAR Alternate assessments will be removed from the bank. New assessment tasks will be developed to allow tasks to be rotated in annually so that over time all STAAR reporting categories will be included in STAAR Alternate. The assessment

task development process and production standards that were used for TAKS–Alt will be continued for STAAR Alternate. TEA will identify and implement a curriculum alignment verification process for STAAR Alternate that meets federal requirements.

### **Fifteen Percent of Grade and Cumulative Score**

As mentioned in the STAAR Modified section, when addressing cumulative and minimum score requirements or the requirement that districts count the score a student receives on an EOC assessment as 15% of the student’s final course grade, current legislation does not provide requirements for students taking a modified or alternate assessment. Because of the nature of the student’s disability and the design of the test, TEA recommends that districts not be required to count the STAAR Alternate EOC assessment as 15% of the student’s course grade or require a cumulative score for graduation purposes.

## **Setting Student Performance Standards for STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate**

### ***Performance Standard Requirements***

The general STAAR EOC assessments include a cut score that indicates the minimum score used to determine whether a student’s score on a particular EOC assessment may count toward his or her cumulative score in that content area. A minimum score on the STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate EOC assessments should not be necessary, since the calculation of the cumulative score for both STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate is not recommended. The purpose of the cumulative score for the general assessment is to allow flexibility for students to meet their testing requirement for graduation. Students taking the modified or alternate assessments have flexibility in their testing requirements for graduation because their requirements are determined by their ARD committee, so the calculation of a cumulative score for these assessments is not necessary.

In addition to the two cut scores required by federal statute and the minimum score, state legislation currently mandates that a performance standard indicating college readiness be established for the English III and Algebra II general STAAR EOC assessments. This cut score is intended to indicate that the student is prepared to be successful in an entry-level college course without remediation. A college-readiness cut may not be appropriate for students taking the modified or alternate assessments, and it should be noted that an EOC Algebra II test will not be developed for STAAR Modified or STAAR Alternate. Students taking STAAR Modified are receiving modified instruction because they do not progress academically at the same rate as their non-disabled peers. Students taking STAAR Alternate are receiving instruction at the prerequisite skill level because of a significant cognitive disability. Students taking either of these assessments will be on the MHSP. For these reasons, a college readiness cut for STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate is not recommended. Instead, the higher level of proficiency on the STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate EOC assessments may be set such that it is more similar to an advanced cut than to a college readiness cut.

## Standard-Setting Process

Although the STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate standard-setting processes will include the same components as the process used for the general STAAR assessments, some of the components will be adjusted to address the variations found in the STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate designs. The standard-setting process used for STAAR Modified will be more similar to the process used for the general assessments because the design of STAAR Modified is more similar to the general assessments. The process used for STAAR Alternate will be tailored to address the unique test design of STAAR Alternate.

## Timeline

The following tables provide an outline of the standard-setting activities expected to take place for the STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate assessments over the next five years.

### Upcoming Standard-Setting Activities for STAAR Modified

Year	Activities
2010–2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning for empirical studies to collect data for standard-setting meetings</li> </ul>
2011–2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empirical studies and data analysis</li> <li>• STAAR Modified EOC standard setting (English I, English II, Algebra I, geometry, biology, and world geography)—summer 2012</li> </ul>
2012–2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STAAR Modified grades 3–8 standard setting—fall 2012</li> <li>• Empirical studies and data analysis</li> <li>• STAAR Modified EOC standard setting (world history)—summer 2013</li> </ul>
2013–2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empirical studies and data analysis</li> <li>• STAAR Modified EOC standard setting (English III and U.S. history)—summer 2014</li> <li>• STAAR Modified EOC standards review (English I, English II, Algebra I, geometry, biology, and world geography)—August 2014</li> </ul>
2014–2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empirical studies and data analysis</li> <li>• STAAR Modified grades 3–8 standards review—September/October 2014</li> </ul>

### Upcoming Standard-Setting Activities for STAAR Alternate

Year	Activities
2010–2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the types of empirical studies that could inform standard setting</li> </ul>
2011–2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empirical studies and data analysis if appropriate based on evaluation</li> </ul>
2012–2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STAAR Alternate grades 3–8 standard setting (all tests)—fall 2012</li> <li>• STAAR Alternate EOC standard setting (English I, Algebra I, biology, and world geography)—fall 2012</li> </ul>
2013–2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STAAR Alternate EOC standard setting (English II and geometry)—fall 2013</li> </ul>
2014–2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STAAR Alternate EOC standard setting (English III, world history, and US history)—fall 2014</li> </ul>

For more information regarding performance standards and timelines for the general STAAR program, see Chapter 2.

