

September 4, 2015

To the Administrator Addressed:

SUBJECT: Important Changes to the Texas Assessment Program for the 2015–2016 School Year

The purpose of this communication is to provide information about important changes to the Texas assessment program for the 2015–2016 school year.

CHANGES IN CONTRACTED SERVICES FOR THE TEXAS ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

As announced in the communication sent on August 19, 2015, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has awarded the Program Integration and State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) components of the student assessment contract to Educational Testing Service (ETS). The STAAR Alternate 2, Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) components of the contract have been awarded to Pearson.

Additional information will be provided as districts prepare for testing and changes are made to the test management system and online testing platforms.

STAAR GRADES 3–8 MATHEMATICS PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Standard-setting committees were convened in July to provide TEA with recommendations for [new performance standards for STAAR grades 3–8 mathematics](#). Updated reports for grades 3–8 (Confidential Student Reports, Confidential Campus Rosters, Summary Reports, and Student Data Files) with the new mathematics performance standards and phase-in applied were provided to districts online in early September. Hard copies of the Confidential Student Reports (CSRs) and Confidential Student Labels will be sent to school districts by September 10, 2015.

The Student Success Initiative (SSI) grade-advancement requirements are being reinstated for mathematics in the 2015–2016 school year. Therefore, retest opportunities will be offered for STAAR mathematics at grades 5 and 8, in addition to STAAR reading, on the dates shown on the 2015-2016 testing calendar online at <http://tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/calendars/>.

CALCULATOR POLICY

Calculators are required for the following STAAR assessments: grade 8 mathematics, Algebra I, Algebra II, and biology. Beginning in the 2015–2016 school year, the calculator policy for these assessments is expanding. Districts can now satisfy the calculator requirements by providing students with either a handheld calculator or a calculator application available on a tablet. The updated calculator policy is posted on the student assessment website.

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES TO THE STAAR PROGRAM

Senate Bill 149, House Bill 743, and House Bill 2349, which were passed during the 84th legislative session, necessitate changes to the STAAR program.

Senate Bill 149 requires districts to appoint an individual graduation committee (IGC) for students in grades 11 and 12 who have not met the STAAR testing requirements for graduation. The IGC will be convened for students who have not passed two or fewer STAAR EOC assessments following the student's 11th grade year. If the student meets the curriculum requirements for graduation, the committee determines whether the student may qualify to graduate after considering additional information about the student's academic performance and the completion of additional requirements recommended by the committee. In August 2015, final assessment rules relating to the IGC provisions were filed as adopted with the *Texas Register* under the commissioner's rulemaking authority.

House Bill 743 requires that STAAR assessments be designed so that 85% of students can complete the grades 3–5 assessments in two hours and 85% of students can complete the grades 6–8 assessments in three hours. During the 2015–2016 school year, TEA will redesign the STAAR grades 4 and 7 writing tests so they will be completed in one four-hour administration. These redesigned writing assessments will be administered beginning in spring 2016. In addition, TEA will gather data during the spring 2016 administrations to determine how to adjust the remaining grades 3–8 assessments to meet the testing time requirements of HB 743. The remaining redesigned grades 3–8 assessments will be administered beginning in spring 2017.

House Bill 2349 requires a school district or charter school that administers a STAAR test to report to the agency whether an assessed student transferred into the school or district from out of state during the current school year. Procedures describing the method by which districts and schools will report out-of-state transfer students to the agency are being established by TEA and will be communicated to the field in the appropriate test administration materials. The assessment results of out-of-state transfer students will be reported separately from the results of a district's or school's other students.

House Bill 2349 also revised the state's assessment requirements that students must meet to be eligible to receive a Texas diploma. Effective with the 2015–2016 school year, a student who earned high school credit for a course for which there is an EOC assessment prior to enrollment in a Texas public school and the credit has been accepted by a Texas public school or who had completed a course for high school credit in a course for which there is an EOC assessment prior to the 2011–2012 spring administration, is not required to take that EOC in order to receive a Texas diploma. Prior to HB 2349, a student on the foundation program was required to take and pass all five EOC assessments in order to receive a Texas diploma regardless of course enrollment.

STAAR ALGEBRA II AND ENGLISH III ASSESSMENTS

In May 2016, STAAR Algebra II and English III assessments will be available for districts to administer on an optional basis as postsecondary readiness measures. Texas Education Code (TEC) specifies that test results cannot be used for class grades, class rank, accountability, or teacher evaluation. However, TEC stipulates that students can use their scores on STAAR Algebra II and English III to meet the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) testing requirement.

Districts that elect to offer either STAAR Algebra II or English III or both assessments must administer the tests to all students in the district who are enrolled in these courses. During the participation collection window, districts will need to provide counts for students that will be taking STAAR Algebra II and English III assessments.

2015 RELEASED TESTS

All 2015 STAAR released tests except 3–8 mathematics have been posted on the student assessment website. A partial release of grades 3–8 mathematics questions, including grades 3–5 Spanish, has also been released. A partial release is a subset of test questions that are eligible for the assessment but do not represent the entire test blueprint. This partial release includes test questions that focus on new student expectations and readiness standards.

2016 RELEASE TEST PLAN

In August 2016, TEA will release the primary form of all 2016 STAAR general assessments, including braille versions of the assessments, as well as STAAR Spanish, STAAR L, STAAR A, and STAAR Alternate 2. All released tests will be posted on TEA's Student Assessment Division website.

CHANGES TO TELPAS HOLISTIC RATING TRAINING

TELPAS holistic rating training will include changes for the 2015–2016 school year. Key changes beginning in January 2016 include the following:

- online training courses and calibrations will be available at a new website that will allow for a more streamlined training experience
- calibration must be completed in a monitored setting
- the number of opportunities to calibrate will be reduced from three sets to two sets
- supplemental support provider training requirements will be eliminated
- local procedures must be established for verifying the completion of training and calibration
- training history will no longer be available

Calibration procedures are being streamlined to simplify the process while enhancing security.

TELPAS WRITING AUDIT

There will be a TELPAS writing audit in spring 2016. The purpose of the TELPAS writing audit is to provide ongoing evidence of the validity and reliability of the holistically rated writing component of the TELPAS assessment to meet state and federal requirements. Under this assessment system, teachers are trained to use the TELPAS Proficiency Level Descriptors (PLDs) to rate the English language proficiency of students in specified language domains, including writing. The primary audit activities include the following:

- evaluating the extent to which the writing English language proficiency ratings assigned by teacher raters match those assigned by state audit raters,
- gathering feedback from teacher raters on the quality of their training for writing, and
- examining how well educators followed state-defined administration procedures to rate writing performance.

Districts will be notified in the spring of their participation and the processes they need to follow to be compliant with the audit.

If you have questions or need additional information about the 2015–2016 assessment activities, please call TEA's Student Assessment Division at (512) 463-9536.

Assessment Contact Information

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cc: ESC and District Test Coordinators