

Chapter 8

Transitioning from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) to the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)—Associated Changes in Scope and Cost

The size, complexity, and scope of the current assessment program have expanded significantly since TAKS was first implemented in 2003, and consequently the cost of the program has increased as well. In moving forward, the STAAR program maintains and in many areas increases the requirements of the current assessment program. In addition, since the implementation of TAKS, the student population for grades 3–11 has increased by approximately 320,000 students, an increase of more than 11 percent. It is anticipated that the number of students will continue to grow as it has in the past. By maintaining many of the requirements of the current program and including the increases in scope and student population growth, the new assessment program will of necessity cost more than the current assessment program. The list below highlights the expanding scope of the STAAR program.

Increase in Scope from TAKS to STAAR

- The number of tests developed and administered will increase from TAKS to STAAR.
- The number of test items will increase on STAAR across most grades and subjects.
- The number of tests required for graduation, and thus eligible for retesting, will triple for most students when the STAAR program is implemented.
- More tests will be administered in dual-mode (online- and paper-version tests).
- Legislatively mandated studies are required for STAAR.
- Standards for STAAR are required to be reviewed at least every three years.
- All reports will be provided online, and the student assessment data portal is being implemented for use by students, parents, teachers, school districts, and institutions of higher education.
- Assessment data files and reports for state and federal accountability purposes will now be provided by the test contractor for district use.
- The number of students taking the statewide assessments will continue to increase.

Increases in materials and transportation costs can also be expected to occur, contributing to the increases in cost to the program.

Increased Costs for School Districts

In addition to increased costs at the state level for the student assessment program, costs will also increase at the school district level to implement STAAR locally. Although all STAAR assessments will be available on paper, if districts elect to increase STAAR EOC online testing, increased costs for computer hardware, software, and additional infrastructure may result. STAAR EOC administrations will be offered three times a year, and current statute allows any student to retest on an EOC assessment for any reason during the assessment windows. The TAKS exit level retests will continue to be administered until the EOC tests are fully implemented, and possibly beyond. With three EOC testing opportunities (fall, spring, and summer), there may be 12 or more days of testing required (because 12 different subjects will be tested during each administration) instead of four days of testing as is currently the case with each TAKS exit level opportunity. Increased testing days results in the need for districts to have additional staff available during the assessments windows. In addition to increased demands for staffing resources and facilities costs (schools will need to be open longer during the summer for additional testing), the need to print optional materials will increase under STAAR. In addition, there is likely to be an increased need for remediation for students who do not pass EOC assessments and need to retest. This will result in increased local costs to provide the necessary remediation. The following chart outlines the required number of testing days currently for high school TAKS compared to the number of days of testing that will be required for the STAAR EOC program when it is fully implemented.

Number of Testing Days for High School TAKS and STAAR EOC

	High School TAKS Assessment Program	STAAR EOC Assessment Program
Number of Testing Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade 9 – reading and mathematics (2 days) • Grade 9 – reading field test (1 day) • Grade 10 – ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies (4 days) • Grade 10 – ELA field test (1 day) • Grade 11 (Exit Level) – ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies (4 days; up to 16 days for retesting) • Exit Level – ELA field test (1 day) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English I (2 days) • English II (2 days) • English III (2 days) • Algebra I (1 day) • Geometry (1 day) • Algebra II (1 day) • World History (1 day) • World Geography (1 day) • U.S. History (1 day) • Biology (1 day) • Chemistry (1 day) • Physics (1 day) • 2 additional testing opportunities per year
	Total – 13 (25 with Exit Level retesting)	Total – 15 (45 with retesting)

Cost Containment Initiatives Implemented with STAAR

In moving to the new assessment program, TEA has identified opportunities to promote cost savings without affecting the quality of the program. Examples of cost-saving solutions that are built into the new program are listed below.

- Distributed scoring is a secure, web-based scoring model where readers can participate in the scoring of written compositions and open-ended items from any location, therefore reducing infrastructure costs. Distributed scoring for written compositions and open-ended reading items will be used for writing at grades 4 and 7 as well as English I, English II, and English III.
- Adjustments were made to scoring procedures for written compositions that will require fewer readers to complete the scoring of the written compositions, resulting in reduced costs for scoring without compromising the scoring process.
- Educator meetings will be held at the contractor's facility rather than holding the meetings at hotels.
- Paper-based reporting will be decreased in favor of increasing the amount of online reporting provided to districts, allowing for more timely information.
- Changes to grade 3 test administration procedures will allow students to mark their answers on an answer document.
- Due to legislative changes that require tests to be released every three years (previously every two years), it will be possible to reduce the number of test items to be developed annually for the STAAR assessments.
- The distribution of supplementary test administration materials, such as mathematics and science formula charts and rulers, will be reduced. These materials will be incorporated into the test booklets at a lower cost to the program.
- Students who have TAKS as their graduation requirement will be limited in their participation in optional EOC assessments. TAKS students taking EOC assessments will be required to test online and will not be able to take English I, II, or III because of the significant costs associated with scoring these tests.
- The move to embedded field-test items in STAAR assessments will result in no stand-alone field-test administrations (except grade 4 writing every three years), thus reducing costs.
- Currently out-of-school students register for administrations through a paper registration process. Registration will now occur online only for these students.

With the increase in students testing, along with additional tests being administered in the future, these cost savings will not be sufficient to offset the additional costs to the program. The last year of the previous contract (September 1, 2009–August 31, 2010) that provided services for student assessment was \$85,208,340. In 2011–2012, the school year when all twelve EOC assessments will be implemented, the cost of the contract will be \$89,058,910, representing a 4.3 percent increase.

