

# Texas Education Today

## News from the Texas Education Agency



### High Steppers

Under the direction of Nikki Howell, the Thomas Jefferson High School Lassos and Wranglers dance team from the San Antonio Independent School District performed at the State Board of Education's Jan. 27 meeting. [More photos](#) of the Lassos and Wranglers performance are available on [Flickr](#).

### STAAR

#### Understanding the standard-setting process

Work is under way to set the performance standards on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness. These standards will determine what it takes to pass the test or excel on it. [\[complete story\]](#)

#### For the love of teaching

#### Texas Teacher receives Milken Award

Kristina Carsow's love of teaching produced a big reward for her this Valentine's Day. During a packed school assembly, she was showered with an outpouring of love from students and faculty as she learned that she will receive a \$25,000 teaching prize. [\[complete story\]](#)

### SBOE

#### New instructional material adoption schedule

Responding to substantial revisions in the state's textbook adoption and distribution process, the State Board of Education in January revised the instructional materials adoption process and approved a schedule through 2019. [\[complete story\]](#)

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## STAAR™ Q &amp; A

## Understanding the STAAR standard-setting process

Work is under way to set the performance standards on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). These standards will determine what it takes to pass the test or excel on it. Below are frequently asked questions related to this process.

### What are performance standards?

They are the standards used to determine whether a student passes a test such as STAAR or reaches a distinguished achievement level. Several passing levels will be set for STAAR. The performance standards relate test performance directly to the state's curriculum standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.

### What are these performance categories called?

- Level I: Unsatisfactory Academic Performance
- Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance
- Level III: Advanced Academic Performance

### When will performance standards be set?

The performance standards for the STAAR end-of-course exams will be set by late March. The passing standards for the grades 3-8 STAAR tests will be set by December.

### How will the performance standards or cut scores be set for STAAR?

It's an involved nine-step process that began in 2009, with linking studies that compare STAAR content with that of other tests such as SAT and ACT. Additionally, linking studies were used to compare one grade to the next, for example, seventh grade mathematics compared to eighth grade mathematics. See standard setting chart on page 3.

### Who is involved in setting the standards?

Texas educators helped develop the performance labels (Level I, II and III). A committee composed of Texas educators and education policy makers met Feb. 1-2 to make initial recommendations about broad ranges or neighborhoods for the cut scores.

A standard setting committee, composed of Texas educators and higher education officials, will next take all the information available at this point and in late February will recommend specific cut scores. Staff of the Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board will review the cut-score recommendations across content areas and present final recommendations to the commissioner of education and the higher education commissioner.

By law, the two commissioners must jointly approve the college readiness standards on the

English III and Algebra II assessments. The commissioner of education will approve all other standards.

### Are the passing standards set in stone?

No, they will be reviewed every three years and could be changed at that time.

### Why can't the passing standard simply be 70 percent?

Standardized tests use scale scores, rather than a percentage grade. Scale scores allow the test to take into account the varying levels of difficulty of questions across the years of the testing program. A high stakes test needs to maintain the same level of difficulty from year to year, rather than fluctuating in difficulty as the test questions change.

### Have we ever used scale scores before?

Yes. Currently a scale score of 2100 is required to pass the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Another scale score familiar to many can be found on the SAT and ACT exams. For example, if a student says he earned a score of 600 out of a possible 800 on the SAT mathematics exam, he is referring to a scale score.

### Will the passing standards be phased in?

The commissioner has not officially made a decision. However, he has indicated that he will phase in the Level II standards. In the past, the state has successfully used a phase-in approach to passing standards, which allows a gradual ratcheting up of requirements. A phase-in would allow school districts an appropriate amount of time to adjust instruction, provide new professional development and close knowledge gaps.

### What is the cumulative score that students must achieve on the end-of-course exams to meet their graduation requirements?

The cumulative score has not yet been determined. This determination will be made immediately after the commissioner sets the performance standards.

### Why is it taking so long to set the standards?

State law mandating the development and implementation of the new state assessment program requires the agency to conduct validity and linking studies that compare the rigor of STAAR to other standardized tests such as ACT, SAT, NAEP, and Accuplacer. While these studies provide external validity evidence that can be used to ensure that appropriate performance standards are set, conducting these studies has added time to the standard-setting process.

## Timeline for STAAR EOC Standard-Setting Process

Standard-Setting Process	Description	Timeline
1. Validity and linking studies conducted*	External validity evidence will be collected to inform standard setting and support interpretations of the standards. Scores on each assessment will be linked to performance on other assessments in the same content area.	Studies started in spring 2009 and will continue throughout the program.
2. Development of performance labels and policy definitions*	Committee convened jointly by TEA and THECB to recommend number of performance categories, performance category labels and general policy definitions for each performance category.	September 2010
3. Development of specific performance-level descriptors for each course*	Committees consisting primarily of educators will develop performance-level descriptors as an aligned system, describing a reasonable progression of skills within each content area (English, mathematics, science, and social studies).	November 2011
4. Policy Committee*	Committee will consider policy implications of performance standards and empirical study results and make recommendations to inform reasonable ranges ("neighborhoods") for the cut scores.	February 1-2, 2012
5. Standard Setting Committee	Committees will consist of members with higher education and policy background in addition to K-12 educators. They will use the performance labels, policy definitions, specific PLDs, and "neighborhoods" set by the policy committee to recommend cut scores for each STAAR EOC assessment. The specific PLDs will also be finalized.	Week of February 20 and 27, 2012
6. Internal Review of Performance Standards	TEA and THECB will review the cut-score recommendations across content areas and present final recommendations to commissioners for approval.	Early March 2012
7. Approval of Performance Standards	Approved by Commissioner of Education (and Commissioner of Higher Education for postsecondary readiness standards).	Mid-March 2012
8. Implementation of Performance Standards	Performance standards will be reported to students after the spring 2012 administration. Phase-in process TBD.	May 2012
9. Review of Performance Standards	Done on a pre-determined schedule at least every three years.	Fall 2014

\* This step has already been completed.



## TEKS

## SBOE gives preliminary approval to new math standards

The State Board of Education gave preliminary approval at its January meeting to revised curriculum standards for mathematics.

Educators based the new standards on the commissioner's draft of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), as well as math standards from Massachusetts, Minnesota and international standards from places such as Singapore, which are all believed to have some of the world's best math curriculum standards.

"My goal is for Texas to have the best math standards," Commissioner of Education Robert Scott told the board.

A formal public comment period will open approximately Feb. 24 on the new math standards, with final approval of the new TEKS expected April 20.

The board made mostly minor changes to the math standards, however, they added a personal financial literacy strand to the mathematics TEKS

for kindergarten through grade eight to meet the requirements of Senate Bill 290 that requires financial literacy to be included in K-8 math instruction.

In addition, the board approved an amendment that says the new mathematics standards will not be implemented until new textbooks and other instructional materials are made available to Texas students.

Based on a new instructional materials adoption schedule approved, the new math TEKS, if given final approval by the board in April, would be used in kindergarten through eighth grade Texas classrooms beginning in the 2014-2015 school year if new materials are available.

The revised math TEKS for high school courses would be implemented the following year if new textbooks and other instructional materials for those classes become available for use.

## PAEMST finalists

## Board honors math and science teachers nominated for Presidential Award

The state math and science nominees for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) were honored at the January meeting of the State Board of Education. Pictured from left to right are: TEA's Director of Mathematics Everly Broadway, math teacher Cynthia Knowles from Eisenhower Senior High School in Aldine Independent School District, math teacher Jill Stevens from Trinity High School in Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD, math teacher Dixie Ross from Pflugerville High School in Pflugerville ISD, science teacher Gianluca Corsi from Haltom High School in Birdville ISD, science teacher M.J. Tykoski from Cooper Junior High School in Wylie



ISD, science teacher Joy Killough from Westwood High School in Round Rock ISD, and TEA's Director of Science Irene Pickhardt.



## Achievement

## 26 Texas schools nominated for 2012 Blue Ribbon honors

Commissioner Robert Scott announced the nomination of 26 Texas public schools for the 2012 Blue Ribbon Schools recognition. The award honors schools for academic excellence and for significant progress in closing the achievement gap.

Since 1982, this prestigious program has honored more than 6,000 of America's most successful schools, including 538 Texas public schools. The Blue Ribbon Schools Program honors public and private elementary, middle and high schools. The schools are selected for one of two honors:

- Improving - Schools that dramatically improve student performance to high levels on state tests
- High Achieving - Schools whose students rank in the top 10 percent based on performance on their state standardized tests

The nominated schools were chosen through an objective evaluation of student achievement statistics and other data for the more than 8,000 public school and charter campuses in the state. The schools selected have demonstrated success in closing the achievement gap, and each school has an

economically disadvantaged population of 40 percent or greater.

Schools nominated for the award serve as models of best practices for schools across the state.

The nominated schools will now complete a rigorous application process through the U.S. Department of Education, and announcements of the award winners will be made in September 2012. Schools that receive the award are recognized at the Blue Ribbon School conference in Washington, D.C.

High Performing Schools		
District	Campus	Principal
Brownsboro ISD	Chandler Elementary School	Tina Eaton
Cedar Hill ISD	Bray Elementary School	Robert Johansen
Dallas ISD	Judge Barefoot Sanders Law Magnet	Anthony Palagonia
George West ISD	George West Primary	Patrick James
Gruver ISD	Gruver Elementary School	Amber Holland
Houston ISD	East Early College High School	Tamera Bolden
Houston ISD	Project Chrysalis Middle School	Jose Covarrubia
Katy ISD	Diane Winborn Elementary	Kelly Ricks
Lamar Consolidated ISD	William Velasquez Elementary	Heather Patterson
Montgomery ISD	Montgomery Elementary School	Wendy Graves
Redwater ISD	Redwater Elementary School	Bebe Hayes
Socorro ISD	Mission Early College High School	Armando Aquirre
Sundown ISD	Sundown Elementary	Scott Marshall

Improving Schools		
Austin ISD	Graham Elementary School	Blaine Helwig
Blue Ridge ISD	Blue Ridge High School	Danny Henderson
Dallas ISD	C.A. Tatum Jr. Elementary School	Elena Hill
Dallas ISD	Umphrey Lee Elementary School	Tondolyn Louise Mosley
El Paso ISD	Douglass Elementary School	Lugarda Dominic
Fort Worth ISD	Edward J. Briscoe Elementary School	Shawn Buchanan
Houston Heights Learning Academy	Houston Heights Learning Academy	Yvette East
Houston ISD	Dogan Elementary School	Artice Hedgemon
Houston ISD	Grady Middle School	Gretchen Kasper-Hoffman
Houston ISD	Petersen Elementary School	James Ferguson
La Marque ISD	Inter-City Elementary School	Erin Cole
San Antonio ISD	Fox Tech High School	Dawn Parker
South San Antonio ISD	Zamora Middle School	Patti Annunzio

## Milken Winner

# Pflugerville teacher receives \$25,000 Valentine surprise

Kristina Carssow's love of teaching produced a big reward for her on Valentine's Day. During a packed school assembly, she was showered with an outpouring of love from students and faculty as she learned that she will receive a \$25,000 teaching prize.

This educator from the Pflugerville Independent School District received the 2011-2012 Milken Educator Award.

Carssow is the only Texas educator to receive the award this year and one of only about 40 in the whole country to receive the recognition.

Connally is the only school in Texas to have had two of its teachers recognized with this award. In 2000, Joe Kieke, then the social studies chair at Connally, received the award.

Established by the Milken Family Foundation in 1987, this is now the largest teacher recognition program in the country. It has given educators \$63 million in awards over the past 25 years, including more than \$1 million given to 43 Texas educators.

Each year exceptional educators – considered without their knowledge by a blue-ribbon panel appointed by each state's department of education – are surprised with the news of their \$25,000 cash award, which they can use in any way they choose.

Carssow was already recognized by her district as an outstanding teacher. After working as a classroom teacher and as lead teacher for Connally's Freshman Cornerstone Academy, she was named a master teacher for TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement.

As a TAP leader, Carssow mentors other classroom teachers. She teaches model lessons to demonstrate effective teaching methods and provides professional development training to other teachers. She has also helped develop and establish policies for ninth and 10th grade teachers to use for grading, classroom management and student relationships.

She also prepares after-school tutoring labs in all subject areas for freshmen. Carssow is active at the district level as well, helping to annually update the curriculum and serving on several district level committees.

"Kristina Carssow is a true teacher leader," said Texas Commissioner of Education Robert Scott. "Far too often, we don't honor and recognize the



*Sitting in the stands at a Connally High School assembly, Kristina Carssow was surprised to hear that she is the 2012 Milken Award winner.*



*Carssow poses with her \$25,000 Milken Educator Awards check alongside several dignitaries who attended the notification ceremony. From left to right: Chairman Lowell Milken, Milken Award recipient Kristina Carssow, Commissioner of Education Robert Scott, Pflugerville ISD board member Elva Gladney, and Rep. Mark Strama.*

outstanding educators who work daily to improve the lives of our children. It's an honor to help bring Ms. Carssow the recognition she deserves."



## SB 9

## Agency completes fingerprinting of teachers, district personnel

Almost 700,000 school district employees, both certified and non-certified, were fingerprinted under the requirements of Senate Bill 9, passed in the 80th Texas Legislature in 2007. The process was completed by Texas Education Agency staff in mid-July 2011.

The bill required that the agency fingerprint all certified educators and non-certified school district employees during a period beginning Jan. 1, 2008 and ending Aug. 31, 2011.

In total, 399,509 certified educators and 293,773 non-certified school district employees were fingerprinted.

"The process went over very well," said Jeannie Tomasek, manager of the fingerprinting division. "Our staff worked closely with school district and charter school personnel at every district in the state to ensure success."

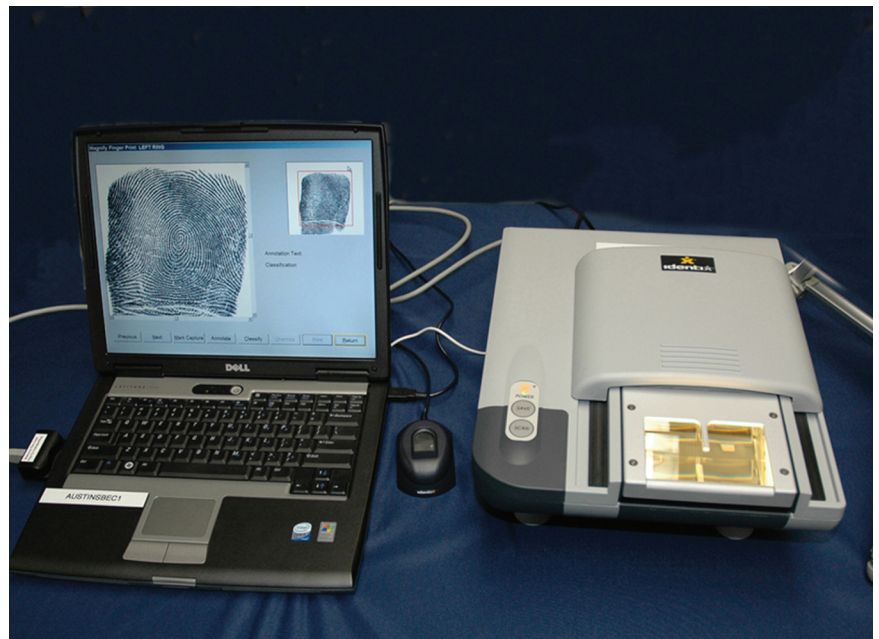
"The entire process would probably not have gone as smoothly without the commitment of each and every school district and charter school and their willingness to work with our staff to do what was needed to be done," Tomasek said. "It was definitely a challenging effort."

According to Chad Wadsworth, with L-1 Enrollment Services, the company that was contracted by the Texas Department of Public Safety to digitally scan the fingerprints, "the Texas education project was the largest on-site fingerprint project for a state customer that we have ever done. And I am not aware of any other projects by a competitor that were of this size."

The SB 9 law required fingerprint-based criminal background reviews for certain school employees. The legislation was enacted to ensure the safety of all children, teachers and staff in Texas public schools.

The legislation required the reviews on:

- All certified educators;
- All substitute teachers and aides;
- Non-certified employees hired on or after Jan. 1, 2008;
- Charter school teachers and other



professionals (serving in a position that would require certification if they were employed in a traditional school district).

The law also required that some individuals, while not subject to the fingerprinting check, were required to undergo a name-based background check. Those included:

- Non-certified employees hired before Jan. 1, 2008;
- Contract employees hired before Jan. 1, 2008 who have direct contact with students;
- Student teachers;
- Volunteers (excluding parents and guardians, those accompanied on campus by a district employee, or individuals volunteering for a single event).

The agency will continue to fingerprint both certified educators and non-certified educators who have not previously been fingerprinted under the provisions of SB 9 as these people are hired.

Applicants for teacher certification are required to submit their fingerprints for a background check as part of the process to receive certification.

Tomasek said the agency's fingerprinting process averaged about 700 certified educators and 6,700 non-certified employees per month in the September to December 2011 time frame.



## Adoption

## Board approves instructional materials adoption schedule

Responding to substantial revisions in the state's textbook adoption and distribution process, the State Board of Education in January revised the instructional materials adoption process and approved a schedule through 2019.

Because of the state's tight budget situation, no new instructional materials will be adopted this year. However, school districts will be notified later this spring about the amount of instructional material allotment they still have available to spend during the 2012-2013 school year. This money can be spent on state adopted materials, other instructional materials, technology and other related expenses. EMAT, the online ordering system is expected to open in April.

Anita Givens, associate commissioner for Standards and Programs, said more and more districts are investing in digital content and technologies such as digital textbooks, online products, iPads, e-readers, and laptops.

During this first year of the instructional material allotment, most districts are continuing to buy state approved materials.

Under the revised adoption schedule, the state board in 2013 will adopt science materials for kindergarten through 12th grade; mathematics

materials for kindergarten through eighth grade and technology applications. These materials, contained in Proclamation 2014, will go into the classrooms in the 2014-2015 school year.

The following lists shows the school year in which new materials will be available for use in Texas classrooms and the grades they will cover:

**School year 2015-2016 (Proclamation 2015):**

Social studies, K-12

Math, 9-12

Fine arts

**School year 2016-2017 (Proclamation 2016):**

Languages other than English

**School year 2017-2018 (Proclamation 2017):**

Career and technical education

**School year 2018-2019 (Proclamation 2018):**

English language arts and reading, K-5

Prekindergarten systems

**School year 2019-2020 (Proclamation 2019):**

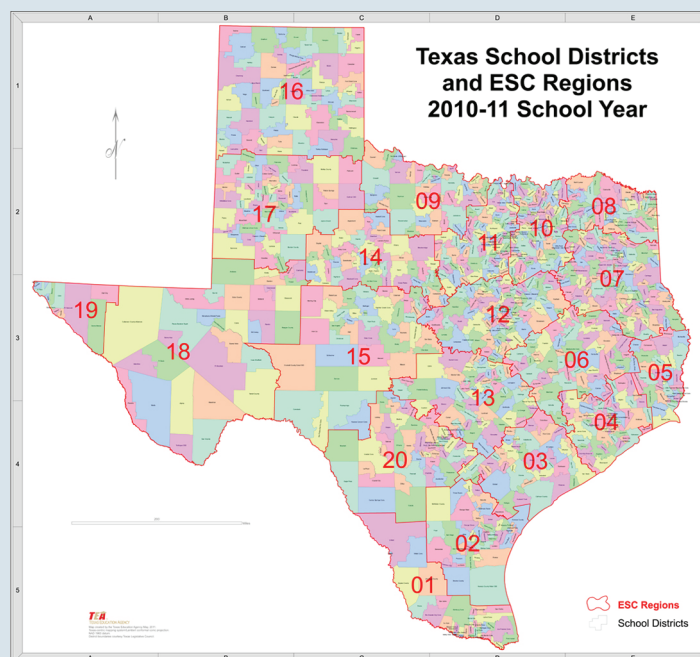
English language arts and reading, 6-12

Health education

Physical education

## New district locator maps available online

Check out a new web page that features the most frequently requested Texas education-related [maps](#). The page provides maps of school district boundaries, education service centers and both current and new State Board of Education district maps.



## Elections

# Legislative redistricting is impacting State Board of Education elections

Uncertainty surrounding the redistricting of Texas Legislative and congressional districts is impacting State Board of Education elections, postponing the board's filing deadlines and primary elections.

All 15 State Board of Education seats are up for election this year. Boundaries for the board districts were redrawn by the Texas Legislature in 2011 based on new census data. These [new board districts](#) have been approved and are not being challenged in court.

However, because a unified primary election is held for all state and federal elections in order to be cost effective, the board elections are being delayed as court challenges postpone the other elections.

A Dec. 16 federal court order pushed the Republican and Democratic primary elections from early March to April 3, with run-off elections scheduled for June 5. However, continuous

legal wrangling over legislative and congressional redistricting now makes an April 3 election seem unlikely. Some predictions say the primary election is

are settled.

As of Feb. 10, all SBOE incumbents who are seeking re-election have an opponent in either the primary or

general election, except one, Patricia Hardy, R-Weatherford. There are currently 25 Republican candidates and 16 Democratic candidates, as well as third-party candidates, seeking SBOE positions.

At a minimum, there will be at least four seats that turn over during this election because the incumbents decided not to seek re-election.

Those members are Mary Helen Berlanga, D-Corpus Christi; Terri Leo, R-Spring; Marsha Farney,

R-Georgetown; and Bob Craig, R-Lubbock.

Those who are elected in November will take office in January 2013. Once seated, a drawing will be held to determine terms. About half the board will draw two year terms and the rest will draw four year terms.



*File photo: State Board of Education members being sworn into office after the last election.*

unlikely to occur before mid-April and could be as late as June.

The candidate filing deadlines were initially extended to Dec. 19, were then closed and are expected to be re-opened at a later date once the legislative and congressional district boundaries

## State Board of Education

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District 3  
**Michael Soto, San Antonio**

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**Bob Craig, Lubbock**

District 6  
**Terri Leo, Spring**

District 7  
**David Bradley, Beaumont**

District 9  
**Thomas Ratliff, Mount Pleasant**

District 10  
**Marsha Farney, Georgetown**

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**George Clayton, Richardson**

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**Mavis B. Knight, Dallas**

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**Gail Lowe, Lampasas**