

September 6, 2016

To the Administrator Addressed:

SUBJECT: Important Changes to the Texas Assessment Program for the 2016–2017 School Year

The purpose of this communication is to provide information about important changes to the Texas assessment program for the 2016–2017 school year.

IMPROVEMENTS TO SHIPPING PROCEDURES

Beginning with the December 2016 administration of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®), ETS will be implementing improvements to shipping procedures. Specifically, these improvements will pertain to the way materials are shipped, tracked, and processed. Additional information will be provided to districts in the *2016 District and Campus Coordinator Manual Supplement*, as well as in the *2017 District and Campus Coordinator Manual*. Training opportunities and additional documentation will be available beginning this fall.

ADDITIONAL FLEXIBILITY AVAILABLE IN ONLINE ADMINISTRATIONS TO BEGIN IN MARCH 2017

Beginning with the March 2017 administration of STAAR, students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) who are eligible for testing accommodations may receive those accommodations through an enhanced online version of STAAR. In addition to three types of embedded accommodations (text-to-speech, language and vocabulary supports, and content supports) that can be assigned on an individual student basis, the online version of STAAR will include enhanced accessibility features that are available to all students. These enhancements will allow all students to take the same online test form and eliminate the need for separate STAAR A and STAAR L test forms going forward. Therefore, STAAR A and STAAR L will both be administered for the last time in December 2016. This change also allows districts who choose to do so, to administer all grades and subjects of the general STAAR (English version only) tests online to any or all of their students.

Within the next several days, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will provide districts with preliminary guidance regarding students with disabilities whose individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 plans reflect that they are to take STAAR A in spring 2017. As language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) decisions are made in the spring of the school year, changes regarding STAAR L will be discussed in the LPAC Guide to Decision Making that will be released in December 2016. In addition, TEA will hold a TETN in late September to discuss these changes in greater detail.

Districts will begin to receive information this fall on how the changes will affect registration, online testing, scoring, and reporting. Districts will have opportunities to attend training on the changes to the STAAR Assessment Management System and the STAAR Online Testing Platform.

SUBSTITUTE ASSESSMENTS FOR STAAR

Prior to the spring 2017 administration of STAAR end-of-course (EOC) assessments, TEA intends to update the allowable substitute assessments and cut scores that can be used in place of the STAAR EOCs to meet graduation requirements. TEA is examining the degree of content overlap between the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and the following national tests:

- the SAT suite of assessments (PSAT 8/9, 10, NMSQT, and the SAT)
- the ACT and the ACT Aspire

After completion of the content overlap studies, TEA will determine what tests will be allowed as substitute assessments for graduation, along with the score requirement for each approved substitute.

Regarding the ACT, SAT, and PSAT, current Texas Administrative Code reflects those tests administered prior to the 2015–2016 school year. TEA anticipates no changes for the other currently approved substitutes (AP, IB, PLAN, and the TSI assessment).

REDESIGN OF STAAR CONFIDENTIAL STUDENT REPORTS

The STAAR Confidential Student Reports (CSRs) will be redesigned this fall, and the new reports will be available beginning with the spring 2017 STAAR administrations.

CHANGES TO THE LENGTH OF THE STAAR ASSESSMENTS BASED ON HOUSE BILL 743

In order to comply with the mandates of House Bill 743, the STAAR assessments will be shortened so that 85 percent of students will be able to complete the assessment instrument within two hours in grades 3–5 and within three hours in grades 6–8. The STAAR assessments will include both operational and field-test items.

2017 RELEASE TEST PLAN

In August 2017, TEA will release the primary form of all 2017 STAAR general assessments. All released tests will be posted on TEA’s Student Assessment Division website.

TELPAS LISTENING AND SPEAKING PILOT STUDY

In order to minimize the amount of time raters spend in training and preparing to rate TELPAS listening and speaking, TEA is working with stakeholders to redesign the TELPAS listening and speaking assessments for implementation in 2017–2018. This year, TEA will conduct a pilot study of the new TELPAS listening and speaking assessments during the testing window for 2017 TELPAS reading. Information obtained from the pilot study will inform test development and administration policy decisions going forward. TEA will be accepting volunteers to participate in the pilot study. Districts will receive additional information in late September about the process of volunteering for the pilot study. If the volunteer sample is not representative, it may be necessary to select additional campuses for the pilot study.

If you have questions or need additional information about the 2016–2017 assessment activities, please call TEA’s Student Assessment Division at (512) 463-9536.

September 14, 2016

SUBJECT: STAAR Online Administrations Beginning in March 2017

To the District Coordinator Addressed:

The purpose of this email is to provide additional information and guidance related to the changes to the STAAR Online Testing Platform. As explained in TEA's letter to districts dated September 6, 2016, the STAAR Online Testing Platform will include embedded accommodations and other accessibility features beginning with the March 2017 administrations. These enhancements have eliminated the need for separate STAAR A and STAAR L test forms. Therefore, STAAR A and STAAR L will be administered for the last time in December 2016.

The three types of embedded accommodations (i.e., text-to-speech (TTS), language and vocabulary supports, and content supports) as well as the accessibility features (e.g., color overlay, zoom/magnification) in the online version of the STAAR will be comparable to the features included in STAAR A. The online version of the STAAR with language and vocabulary supports and TTS will be comparable to the linguistic accommodations that are included in STAAR L. The enhanced online version of the STAAR, however, is capable of being better tailored to a student's individualized needs. The enhanced STAAR Online Testing Platform will allow the student to receive only the specific embedded accommodations that he or she requires during testing in addition to any of the various built-in accessibility features and preferences that the student chooses to use.

In the case of a student with a disability whose ARD or Section 504 committees selected one or more STAAR A assessments for Spring 2017, the committee will need to update the student's IEP or Section 504 plan so that it reflects each assessment the student will take and describes the specific embedded accommodations and non-embedded accommodations (i.e., supports that are not part of the technology platform) that the student requires during testing. The accessibility features that are available to all students who take the online version of the STAAR need not be listed in a student's IEP or Section 504 plan, unless the student's ARD or Section 504 committee wants to ensure that the student uses a certain feature. A district must determine on a case-by-case basis whether a student's IEP should be revised in an ARD committee meeting or through an agreement to amend the student's IEP.

As in previous years, language proficiency assessment committees (LPACs) will continue to make assessment decisions for English language learners in the spring. The *2017 LPAC Decision Making Guide for State Assessments* will be available in December 2016 and will reflect changes associated with the online testing system.

The Student Assessment Division will host a TETN on September 23, 2016, to provide additional information regarding changes to online accommodations for the spring 2017 administration of STAAR.