

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR™) Standard Setting Questions and Answers

STAAR performance standards: What are performance standards and when will they go into effect?

1. What are academic performance standards?

Academic performance standards represent the degree to which students are learning the content and skills required to be taught, as demonstrated by performance on a test. On the STAAR assessments, there are three levels that describe student performance:

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

The academic performance standards are the cut scores on a test that divide students into these three levels. A student is considered to have passed a given STAAR assessment if he/she earned a score at least as high as the cut score for Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance. The policy definitions for each performance level are described in more detail at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147496801>.

2. When do the STAAR performance standards go into effect?

Performance standards were in place when students took STAAR EOC assessments in spring 2012. However, the setting of performance standards for STAAR 3–8 assessments administered in spring 2012 was delayed in order to link these standards to STAAR EOC standards. Performance standards for students who took STAAR 3–8 will be in place in January 2013.

3. Why are STAAR performance standards being phased in?

A phase-in period has been implemented for STAAR performance standards to provide school districts with time to adjust instruction, provide new professional development, increase teacher effectiveness, and close knowledge gaps. A four-year, two-step phase-in for Level II will be in place for all general STAAR assessments. In addition, STAAR Algebra II, English III reading, and English III writing will have a two-year, one-step phase-in for Level III. The phase-in for Level III: Advanced Academic Performance will allow an appropriate amount of time for students and school districts to adjust to the new assessment requirements, since this level of performance is required for students to graduate under the Distinguished Achievement Program (DAP).

The STAAR EOC phase-in periods for performance standards will be on a student-by-student basis by content area—mathematics, English, science, and social studies. The phase-in standard to which students are held depends upon when they begin testing in a content area and applies to all assessments in that content area. For example, for students who took Algebra I in spring 2012, the first phase-in standard for Level II: Satisfactory Performance will apply to all three mathematics assessments (Algebra I, geometry, and Algebra II). The chart at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147506326> shows a typical STAAR EOC test-taking sequence for cohorts of students under the first phase-in, second phase-in, and recommended standards for Level II as well as the phase-in and recommended standards for Level III.

The STAAR 3–8 phase-in standards for Level II performance began with the 2012 test administration. Phase-in 1 standards for Level II will be in effect for the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years, while phase-in 2 standards will be in effect for the 2013–2014 and 2014–2015 school years. The final recommended Level II standards will be in place for STAAR 3–8 assessments beginning in the 2015–2016 school year. There is no phase-in for Level III performance for STAAR 3–8. The chart at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student/assessment/STAAR_Phase-in_Illustration.pdf shows cohorts of students under the first phase-in, second phase-in, and recommended standards for Level II.

4. Why is a four-year phase-in period for Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance being implemented?

The decision to phase in Level II over a four-year period was based on multiple comparisons using STAAR and TAKS scores. These comparisons suggest that the distance between phase-in standards and recommended standards for the STAAR program is greater than the distance between phase-in standards and recommended standards for the TAKS program. Therefore, a four-year phase-in for STAAR is being implemented instead of the two-year phase-in that was used for TAKS.

5. Why is a two-year phase-in period for Level III: Advanced Academic Performance for STAAR Algebra II, English III reading, and English III writing being implemented?

The distance between the Level III phase-in standards and recommended standards for STAAR Algebra II, English III reading, and English III writing is not as large as the distance between phase-in standards and recommended standards for Level II. In addition, a review of historical-trend data suggests that this distance reflects an amount of gain that students might reasonably be expected to make over a two-year period.

6. Why does the phase-in for Level III: Advanced Academic Performance apply only to STAAR Algebra II, English III reading, and English III writing?

A phase-in for Level III is being implemented for STAAR Algebra II, English III reading, and English III writing because of the legislative requirement that students graduating under the Distinguished Achievement Program (DAP) attain Level III on these assessments. A phase-in for Level III will not be implemented for other STAAR assessments since achieving Level III on other assessments is not required on any graduation plan.

7. How were the phase-in cut scores determined?

Phase-in cut scores were determined empirically for each STAAR assessment based on the recommended Level II and Level III cut scores. For STAAR EOC, phase-in 1 cut scores for Level II were set at 1.0 standard deviation (SD) below the Level II recommended cut scores for the STAAR mathematics, science, and social studies assessments and at 0.5 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores for the STAAR English assessments. Phase-in 2 cut scores for Level II were set at 0.5 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores for the STAAR mathematics, science, and social studies assessments, and at 0.2 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores for the STAAR English assessments. Level III phase-in cut scores for STAAR Algebra II, English III reading, and English III writing were set at the point where students meeting the performance standard would have at least a 75% likelihood of earning a grade of C or better in an entry-level college course. In addition, the phase-in cut scores for Level III are higher than the TAKS Commended performance standard and the recommended STAAR Level II performance standards.

For all STAAR 3–8 assessments, phase-in 1 cut scores for Level II were set at 1.0 SD below the Level II recommended cut scores, and phase-in 2 cut scores were set at 0.5 SD below the Level II

recommended cut scores. These phase-in cut scores are higher than the TAKS Met performance standard.

8. Why are there different phase-in standards for the STAAR English EOC assessments than for the mathematics, science, and social studies assessments?

Multiple comparisons using STAAR and TAKS scores suggest that the distance between phase-in standards and final standards for the STAAR EOC program is generally greater than the distance between phase-in standards and final standards for the TAKS program. However, external study data indicated that a slightly smaller phase-in is appropriate for the STAAR English EOC assessments compared to the phase-in required for the mathematics, science, and social studies assessments.

STAAR performance standards: What performance standards were set and how were they set?

9. What are the STAAR EOC performance standards?

Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance

The phase-in 1 standard is

- 3500 for mathematics, science, and social studies EOC assessments
- 1875 for reading and writing EOC assessments

The phase-in 2 standard is

- 3750 for mathematics, science, and social studies EOC assessments
- 1950 for reading and writing EOC assessments

The recommended standard is

- 4000 for mathematics, science, and social studies EOC assessments
- 2000 for reading and writing EOC assessments

Level III: Advanced Academic Performance

The phase-in standard is

- 4080 for Algebra II
- 2135 for English III reading
- 2155 for English III writing
- Phase-in standards for Level III are not applicable to the other EOC assessments.

The recommended standard is

- 4333 for Algebra I, 4397 for geometry, and 4411 for Algebra II
- 4576 for biology, 4607 for chemistry, and 4499 for physics
- 4404 for world geography, 4634 for world history, and 4440 for U.S. history
- 2304 for English I reading, 2328 for English II reading, and 2356 for English III reading
- 2476 for English I writing, 2408 for English II writing, and 2300 for English III writing

For 2012, students taking STAAR EOC assessments need to meet the Level II phase-in 1 standards on each assessment to pass (demonstrate Satisfactory Academic Performance). The table at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147506325> provides a more detailed summary of the performance standards for STAAR EOC assessments.

10. What are the STAAR 3–8 performance standards?

For STAAR grades 3–8 mathematics and reading, the phase-in 1, phase-in 2, and recommended performance standards for Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance will vary for each assessment because these assessments are reported on a vertical scale as required by legislation. In

addition, the recommended performance standards for Level III: Advanced Academic Performance will vary for all STAAR 3–8 assessments.

The Level II STAAR performance standards for grades 4 and 7 writing, grades 5 and 8 science, and grade 8 social studies are as follows:

- Phase-in 1: 3500
- Phase-in 2: 3750
- Recommended: 4000

For 2012, students taking STAAR 3–8 assessments need to meet the Level II phase-in 1 standards on each assessment to pass (demonstrate Satisfactory Academic Performance). The table at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/STAAR_3-8_Performance_Standards_Chart.pdf provides a more detailed summary of the performance standards for STAAR 3–8 assessments.

11. How were the performance standards for the STAAR EOC assessments determined?

Performance standards for STAAR EOC assessments are based on recommendations from standard-setting committees. These committees—convened in February and March 2012—were composed of both K–12 educators and higher education faculty, and each panelist was an expert in both the assessed content (e.g., chemistry) and the high school curriculum (i.e., the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills [TEKS]). In addition, a policy committee convened in early February 2012 to recommend reasonable score ranges within which performance standards should be set. This committee—composed of policy experts, legislative staff, business and workplace leaders, and secondary- and higher-education representatives—used the results of various studies to inform its recommendations. These studies established links between performance on STAAR and performance on other assessments and provided research-based anchors for setting meaningful and rigorous performance standards. A brief description of the standard-setting process used for STAAR EOC assessments can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147506324>.

12. How were the performance standards for the STAAR 3–8 assessments determined?

Performance standards for STAAR 3–8 assessments are based on recommendations from standard-setting committees. These committees—convened in October 2012—were composed of K–12 educators, and each panelist was an expert in both the assessed content (e.g., grade 5 mathematics) and the assessed curriculum (i.e., the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills [TEKS]). Similar to the STAAR EOC standard-setting process, panelists were provided reasonable ranges within which performance standards should be set. The ranges were determined by considering the alignment of performance standards with EOC assessments and by using the results of various studies. The studies established links between performance on STAAR and performance on other assessments and provided research-based anchors for setting meaningful and rigorous performance standards. A brief description of the standard-setting process used for STAAR 3–8 assessments can be found at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/STAAR_3-8_Standard_Setting_9_Steps.pdf.

13. Why were STAAR EOC performance standards set before high-stakes data were available?

A decision was made to set the performance standards prior to the first high-stakes administration (spring 2012) of the STAAR EOC assessments. The impact data used in the standard-setting process were based on student performance during the spring 2011 administration, during which the EOC assessments were not part of graduation requirements for students. Several factors contributed to the decision to set standards without high-stakes, motivated data.

- Without a defined course sequence, ninth-grade students could have taken any of the fifteen EOC assessments in the 2011–2012 school year. (Because the English I, II, and III reading and writing assessments are assessed and reported separately, they count as six rather than three EOC assessments.)
- Even after the first high-stakes administration, motivated data would have been available only for the five EOC assessments typically taken by ninth-grade students (English I reading, English I writing, Algebra I, biology, and world geography).
- Performance standards needed to be established before the end of the 2011–2012 school year so that summer remediation can be scheduled for those students who were unsuccessful on the EOC assessments in the spring.
- Statute requires that EOC assessment performance standards be linked for the English and algebra assessments, so standards for these assessments had to be set at the same time.

14. Why were the performance standards for STAAR EOC assessments set before the EOC administrations, but the STAAR 3–8 performance standards were set after the administrations?

Texas Education Code (TEC) §39.0241 requires that performance standards be aligned from grade 3 through high school. Under an aligned set of standards, student performance at each level (i.e., Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory, or Advanced Academic Performance) within a content area should indicate whether or not the student is on track to be successful in the next grade or course.

In order to align the performance standards in this way, TEA started with STAAR EOC assessments at the high school level and worked backwards to grade 3. This means that performance standards for STAAR grades 3–8 could not be set until performance standards for STAAR EOC had been determined. Based on the requirements in law that TEA determine STAAR EOC cut scores by looking at a variety of external data, the earliest the performance standards could be established was April 2012. Given this fact, STAAR performance standards for grades 3–8 could not be set in time to report spring 2012 test scores in the regular time frame. Now that performance standards for STAAR 3–8 have been established, they will be applied to spring 2012 test scores and reported in January 2013.

15. What does postsecondary readiness mean?

According to TEC §39.024(a), postsecondary readiness is the level of preparation a student must attain in English language arts and mathematics courses to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in an entry-level general education course for credit in that same content area for a baccalaureate degree or associate degree program or for certificates or credentials other than baccalaureate or advanced degrees. It should be noted, however, that the measurement of postsecondary readiness through the Algebra II and English III assessments will be only one piece of information that students, parents, and schools will have in making readiness determinations. Algebra II and English III are courses students typically take in grade 11; after students have taken these assessments and potentially met the Level II or Level III performance standards, they will need to continue to take higher-level courses in grade 12 to acquire content knowledge and fully prepare for postsecondary success.

16. What is the relationship between the performance standards and postsecondary readiness for STAAR Algebra II, English III reading, and English III writing?

Research study data indicate that the concept of postsecondary readiness represents a continuum of preparedness. Postsecondary readiness is not an “all or nothing” status that students achieve at a

certain level of test performance. Rather, students may have varying degrees of postsecondary readiness based upon the level of performance on the test. For example, students who achieve Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance are *sufficiently prepared* for postsecondary success. Similarly, students who achieve Level III: Advanced Academic Performance are *well prepared* for postsecondary success. For more information about the policy definitions for the STAAR performance levels, see

<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147496801>

17. What research studies were used as part of the standard-setting process?

TEA conducted extensive research to support the standard-setting process. Studies focused on creating links between STAAR assessments and other measures of students' knowledge and skills. Some studies focused on comparisons between STAAR assessments and corresponding TAKS tests. Research was conducted to link STAAR grade 7 writing scores and grade 8 reading, mathematics, science, and social studies scores to first-year STAAR EOC assessment scores in the corresponding content areas. Additional studies linked STAAR assessments to established national and international assessments, such as SAT, ReadiStep, ACT, EXPLORE, NAEP, and PISA. Finally, research was conducted to link STAAR EOC scores to corresponding grades in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses. To support reliable and meaningful score interpretations, links between two assessments were based on the same students taking STAAR and one of the assessments listed above, when data were available. For example, SAT mathematics performance was compared to STAAR Algebra II performance for the same group of students.

18. How were vertical scales for reading and mathematics used as part of the standard-setting process?

The vertical scales for reading and mathematics empirically link student performance on STAAR 3–8 assessments within the same subject area. Because a student's vertical scale score can be compared from grade to grade to gauge his or her academic progress in mathematics or reading across time, the vertical scale was used to inform the alignment of performance standards across assessments. The reasonable ranges for performance standards were informed using the alignment of the vertical scale across grades. In addition, the vertical scale allowed standard-setting panelists to consider the progression of performance standards across grades for their specific grade in relation to previously recommended performance standards for higher grades. For example, the grade 5 reading committee considered the recommended performance standards for grades 6, 7, and 8 reading as one piece of information in recommending the grade 5 performance standard.

19. How were the performance standards for the STAAR Spanish 3–5 assessments determined?

Performance standards for the STAAR Spanish 3–5 assessments were set at the same time as the English assessments, following the same process. Because the Spanish assessments in mathematics and science contain items transadapted from the English assessments, only one set of performance standards was recommended for both English and Spanish in each grade and subject assessed. The Spanish reading and writing assessments have passages and items developed uniquely in the Spanish language. Therefore, separate standard-setting committees convened to recommend performance standards specific to the Spanish reading and writing assessments.

20. Will the STAAR performance standards continue to be reviewed in the future as additional data are available?

Performance standards will be formally reviewed at least once every three years, as required by statute, for both STAAR 3–8 and STAAR EOC. The first review of all STAAR standards is scheduled for

fall 2014. At that time, the performance standards will be reviewed and possibly adjusted based on additional research studies and student performance under high-stakes, motivated conditions. In addition to the three-year review of all performance standards, the commissioner of education and the commissioner of higher education will continue to review the reasonableness of the standards for English III and Algebra II. TEA and the Texas Higher Education Coordination Board (THECB) will examine additional impact and validity-study data, including data from longitudinal studies and studies evaluating the relationship between performance on the STAAR English III and Algebra II assessments and success in military service or workforce training, certification, or other credential programs.

STAAR performance standards: What do they mean?

21. Why are the STAAR performance standards presented as scale scores rather than raw scores?

As with many standardized assessments, the STAAR program uses scale scores to communicate information about performance levels. A scale score is a more exact way to determine subject mastery than a raw score because a scale score considers the difficulty level of each individual test question in addition to whether or not a student answers the question correctly.

The basic score on any test is the raw score, which is the number of questions answered correctly regardless of difficulty level. A scale score is a conversion of the raw score onto a scale that takes into account the difficulty level of the specific set of questions used on a test in any given year. A scale-score system allows every test to have exactly the same passing standard, or level of performance required, even though the raw score needed to pass the test may vary slightly from year to year.

When building new tests each year, it is not always possible to select questions that have exactly the same difficulty as questions on previous versions of the test. Maintaining the passing standard (but not necessarily the raw score needed to pass) from year to year is important to ensure that students passing in one year will have exactly the same rigorous testing requirements as students passing in a subsequent year, even though the test questions differ from one year to the next.

It is not informative to compare raw scores or percent of questions answered correctly across test administrations, school years, or tests within the same content area (e.g., Algebra I and Algebra II). When looking at passing standards, a lower raw score (or percent of questions correct) on one test does not necessarily mean that the test is easier than another test with a higher raw score. For example, on one administration of STAAR Algebra II, the passing standard might be at 60% of the questions correct, while for that same administration the passing standard on STAAR Algebra I might be at 63% of the questions correct. This does not mean that it is easier to pass STAAR Algebra II than it is to pass STAAR Algebra I.

22. Why isn't the passing standard for each STAAR assessment set at 70% of the questions correct?

While many people believe a raw score that is equal to 70% of the questions correct should qualify as passing, a score that is simply the percentage of questions correct does not take into account the difficulty of the questions on a test. A student that gets 50% of the questions correct on a very difficult test will likely demonstrate a higher mastery of subject matter or course content than a student that gets 90% of the questions correct on a very easy test.

Consider the following scenario as another way to think about this. You are given a ten-question test on calculus, and you answer 7 out of 10 questions correctly, which equals 70%. Another student is given a ten-question test on multiplication and answers 7 out of 10 questions correctly, which equals 70%. Although you both answer 70% of the questions correctly, it would not be accurate to say that both of you demonstrate the same level of mathematics proficiency. Your test covered more difficult content – calculus as compared to multiplication.

Scale scores are a better indicator of a student's mastery of test content. While raw scores on STAAR will be available to students, parents, and teachers, it is important to understand that answering fewer than 70% of the questions correctly on a test does not necessarily indicate poor performance either in terms of scale scores or mastery of the assessed content.

23. Which STAAR assessments are reported on a vertical scale?

Under TEC §39.036, TEA is required to develop a vertical scale for assessing student performance in grades 3–8 for reading and mathematics. A vertical scale allows for a student's scale scores to be compared across different grades for the same subject area. The changes in the student's vertical scale scores indicate the academic progress the student has made over time. The assessments where vertical scales were developed are STAAR grades 3–8 mathematics and reading in English and STAAR Spanish grades 3–5 mathematics and reading.

24. If a student attains a vertical scale score in the current grade that is higher than the passing score at a future grade, does this mean the student has met the Level II standard at the future grade?

No. While it is appropriate to compare vertical scale scores for the same student across grades to evaluate how much progress that student has made, it is not appropriate to compare a vertical scale score for a student in one grade to the passing standard in a grade in which that student has not yet received instruction. The passing scores on the vertical scale are based on the assumption that a student will have received instruction in the grade-specific curriculum in that subject area.

25. Which STAAR assessments are reported on a horizontal scale?

For any STAAR assessment that is not reported on a vertical scale, the assessment results are reported on a horizontal scale. Horizontal scale scores were developed for STAAR grades 4 and 7 writing, grades 5 and 8 science, grade 8 social studies, and EOC assessments. A horizontal scale converts a raw score onto a scale that allows for comparisons across test forms from year to year for a specific assessment. Similar to vertical scales, horizontal scales maintain the passing standard that students are required to meet in order to reach the Level II or Level III performance categories. However, unlike vertical scales, horizontal scale scores cannot be compared to scale scores for other grades in the same subject area.

26. Why is the 2012 pass rate for students on STAAR grade 8 social studies lower than the other STAAR grade 8 assessments?

In 2010, the Texas State Board of Education approved new social studies TEKS that were implemented in classrooms and assessed for the first time during the 2011–2012 school year. The inclusion of this new content on the STAAR grade 8 social studies assessment, the use of more primary sources in test questions, and the new method of assessing social studies skills embedded in the context of content help explain the lower pass rate, especially in comparison to the TAKS grade 8 social studies assessment.

27. Why are the 2012 pass rates on the STAAR English I reading and English I writing assessments lower than the 2012 pass rates on the STAAR grade 8 reading and grade 7 writing assessments?

The test designs of the STAAR English I reading assessment and the STAAR grade 8 reading assessment are different. The test design of the STAAR English I reading assessment includes both multiple-choice and short answer reading questions. The short answer questions require students to generate a reasonable idea and confirm the validity of that idea by using evidence from the text. Because the short answer reading questions are performance tasks that are worth 32% of the total test score, the English I reading assessment is more rigorous than the grade 8 reading assessment, which is based entirely on answers to multiple-choice questions.

The test design of the STAAR English I writing assessment also differs from the STAAR grade 7 writing assessment. Although students in both grade 7 and English I are required to write two compositions as part of the assessment, the importance of the compositions increases as students move from middle school to high school. Specifically, the grade 7 compositions account for 44% of the total test score, while the English I compositions account for 52% of the total test score. The increase in weighting from grade 7 to English I emphasizes the growing importance of measuring writing in the context of actual performance as students develop their writing skills and become more experienced writers; however, this increase also contributed to lower pass rates in English I.

STAAR performance standards: When will results be reported?

28. When will school districts and parents know the results of the STAAR assessments that were administered in spring 2012?

District and campus performance summaries, data files, and *Confidential Student Reports* (CSRs) were sent in June 2012 for STAAR and STAAR L EOC assessments and will be sent in January 2013 for STAAR 3–8, STAAR Modified, and STAAR Alternate assessments.

29. What information will be reported to parents for the spring 2012 STAAR administrations?

Parents will receive a *Confidential Student Report* (CSR) that contains test results for all STAAR assessments their child took. The CSR indicates a student's performance on each STAAR assessment; it includes performance by reporting category as well as overall test. The CSR also includes the student's scale score, the performance level achieved, and a unique access code for the student data portal, which can be found at <http://www.TexasAssessment.com/students>. Through the student data portal, parents and students can view test results across administrations and years.

30. What phase-in information will be on STAAR score reports?

For STAAR 3–8 and EOC assessments administered in the 2011–2012 school year, score reports will include the phase-in 1 performance standards for Level II and the recommended standards for Level II. For Algebra II, English III reading, and English III writing, the reports will include the phase-in performance standards for Level III. For all other STAAR assessments, the reports will include the recommended performance standards for Level III.

Beginning in spring 2013, phase-in 2 performance standards for Level II will also be included on score reports. Because report formats had to be locked in before final decisions were made about the phase-in plan, it was not possible to include all this information on the spring 2012 reports.

31. How well do students need to perform on STAAR to meet Student Success Initiative (SSI) requirements for grades 5 and 8 reading and mathematics?

For the 2011–2012 school year, there were no Student Success Initiative (SSI) promotion requirements for grades 5 and 8. Certification of SSI requirements for 2012–2013 under TEC §28.0211(m) would require students in grades 5 and 8 to meet the phase-in 1 Level II standard for the reading and mathematics assessments.

32. What is a STAAR EOC cumulative score, and how does it relate to high school graduation?

Students will receive a score on each STAAR EOC assessment they are administered. A student's cumulative score is obtained by combining the individual test scores within each of the four foundation content areas (English reading/writing, mathematics, science, and social studies). For example, think about a student whose test scores in mathematics are as follows:

- Algebra I: 4200
- Geometry: 3800
- Algebra II: 4100

This student would have a cumulative score of 12100, since the scores for all three mathematics assessments would be added together. In order to graduate, students must reach or exceed their cumulative score target, which is based on the Level II performance standard for each content area. The specific cumulative score target for each student will vary depending upon the student's graduation plan and when he/she started taking high school courses in Texas. For many students who begin taking STAAR EOC assessments in 2012 or 2013, the cumulative score target will be 10500 for mathematics, science, and social studies. This cumulative score is based on 3500, the phase-in 1 performance standard for Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance, for each of the three tests within these content areas. However, the cumulative score target is 11250 for English. This cumulative score is based on 1875, the phase-in 1 performance standard for Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance, for each of the six tests within the content area (English I reading and writing, English II reading and writing, and English III reading and writing).

33. Why are the scale scores required to achieve Level II different for the STAAR English EOC assessments than for the mathematics, science, and social studies assessments?

The recommended scale score required for Level II is 2000 for all STAAR English EOC assessments (as opposed to 4000 for all other STAAR EOC assessments) because the scales for the English assessments have about half the range of the scales for all other assessments in mathematics, science, and social studies. This difference exists so that the cumulative score requirement for English is the same as the requirement for the other content areas, even though there are six English assessments (reading and writing for English I, II, and III) compared to three assessments in every other content area.

34. How well do students need to perform on STAAR to graduate from high school?

There are three high school graduation programs in Texas: the Minimum High School Program (MHSP), the Recommended High School Program (RHSP), and the Distinguished Achievement Program (DAP). The graduation testing requirements differ for the three high school programs; however, all three programs include a cumulative score requirement for high school graduation. This requirement is outlined below.

- A student is required to achieve a cumulative score that is at least as high as his/her cumulative score target.

- The cumulative score target is calculated by multiplying the scale score for Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance that is in effect for the student (phase-in 1, phase-in 2, or recommended) by the number of tests he/she is required to take in each content area.
- A student must achieve a score that is at least as high as the minimum score in order for his/her score to count towards the student's cumulative score.
- A student's cumulative score is determined using his/her highest score on each STAAR EOC assessment the student is required to take for graduation purposes.

More details about the curriculum and testing requirements for graduation, starting with the incoming freshmen class of 2011–2012 can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147506323>. The document also provides illustrations of how the cumulative score requirement would apply under the three different high school programs.

35. What minimum score does a student need on STAAR EOC assessments in order to count his/her score in the cumulative score calculation?

A student taking a STAAR EOC assessment must reach or exceed the minimum score. Although the minimum score falls into Level I: Unsatisfactory Academic Performance (failing), it is the scale score needed for a student to be able to include his/her test score in the cumulative score. The minimum score varies by assessment and phase-in period as shown at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147506325>. For example, a first-time grade 9 student taking biology in spring 2012 needs to get a minimum scale score of 3367 (for phase-in 1) to be able to include that test score in his/her science cumulative score.

Minimum scores have been determined statistically for each STAAR EOC assessment based on the scale scores required to achieve Level II. Minimum scores were set at one conditional standard error of measurement (CSEM) below the respective Level II cut scores (phase-in or recommended).

The phase-in 1 minimum score is

- 3371 for Algebra I, 3362 for geometry, and 3350 for Algebra II
- 3367 for biology, 3348 for chemistry, and 3346 for physics
- 3383 for world geography, 3326 for world history, and 3372 for U.S. history
- 1813 for English I reading, 1806 for English II reading, and 1808 for English III reading
- 1798 for English I writing, 1807 for English II writing, and 1808 for English III writing

The phase-in 2 minimum score is

- 3626 for Algebra I, 3619 for geometry, and 3604 for Algebra II
- 3621 for biology, 3600 for chemistry, and 3600 for physics
- 3632 for world geography, 3576 for world history, and 3624 for U.S. history
- 1887 for English I reading, 1880 for English II reading, and 1882 for English III reading
- 1872 for English I writing, 1880 for English II writing, and 1881 for English III writing

The final minimum score is

- 3872 for Algebra I, 3868 for geometry, and 3852 for Algebra II
- 3868 for biology, 3846 for chemistry, and 3848 for physics
- 3874 for world geography, 3822 for world history, and 3869 for U.S. history
- 1936 for English I reading, 1929 for English II reading, and 1932 for English III reading
- 1921 for English I writing, 1928 for English II writing, and 1929 for English III writing

How do the STAAR assessments and performance standards compare to TAKS?

36. How does the content assessed with STAAR compare to the content assessed with TAKS?

Both testing programs, STAAR and TAKS, closely align to the TEKS. However, at the high-school level TAKS is a comprehensive assessment that combines content from multiple grades and subjects (e.g., Algebra I, geometry, and grade 8 mathematics are all assessed on TAKS exit-level mathematics). STAAR EOC assessments are based solely on the content of the courses for which the tests are offered (e.g., the Algebra II assessment tests only Algebra II content). The test questions are written to measure specific student expectations found in the TEKS for each course. Committees of educators review the test questions both for their alignment to the TEKS and their appropriateness for students who have taken the course. There is no “off-level” content included on the STAAR EOC assessments, so students who are taught the curriculum for each course should be prepared to take the assessments.

For STAAR 3–8, the test questions are written to measure specific student expectations found in the TEKS for each grade and subject. Committees of educators review the test questions both for their alignment to the TEKS and their appropriateness for students at each grade. Similarities and differences between the STAAR and TAKS assessments can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/staar/>

37. Was the standard-setting process for STAAR different from what was done for TAKS?

Yes, the process for setting performance standards for STAAR was different in a number of ways. First, research studies were conducted over a three-year period to link performance on a STAAR assessment and performance on other assessments in the same content area. The results of these studies were used to inform various steps of the standard-setting process. Also, in TAKS, the standards were recommended primarily by Texas educators and administrators; for STAAR, the standard-setting process included not only educators and administrators but also educators from higher education, business and workplace leaders, policy experts, legislative staff, and community representatives from across Texas. A summary of the steps used in the STAAR EOC standard-setting process can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147506324>. A summary of the steps used in the STAAR 3–8 standard-setting process can be found at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/STAAR_3-8_Standard_Setting_9_Steps.pdf.

38. How does the difficulty of the STAAR assessments compare to the difficulty of the TAKS assessments?

The STAAR program represents an increase in rigor when compared with TAKS. STAAR assesses content and skills from the TEKS at a greater depth and higher level of cognitive complexity by requiring students to apply content and skills in more integrated and authentic ways. The STAAR test design also focuses on the TEKS that are necessary both for success in the current grade or course and for readiness in the next grade or course.

Results from analyses comparing the difficulty of TAKS and STAAR questions indicate that, overall, the questions on STAAR are more difficult than those on TAKS. For this reason, it is likely that students will initially answer fewer questions correctly on STAAR than they did on TAKS.

39. Will TEA provide score information on STAAR that represents equivalent points to the TAKS passing standard?

TEA provided equivalent score information for STAAR 3–8 assessments, STAAR Algebra I (to TAKS grade 9 mathematics), and STAAR English I reading (to TAKS grade 9 reading) and used this information in Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) calculations for schools in 2012. However, TEA will not provide equivalent score information on other STAAR EOC assessments, as the change from an end-of-grade (TAKS) to an end-of-course (STAAR) assessment program at high school has limited the test-content overlap between TAKS and STAAR. When there is little overlap in the content assessed on different tests, the results of studies that link TAKS to STAAR are not meaningful for interpreting individual student performance or year-to-year trends in school performance. In other words, there is no such thing as an equivalent score without a sufficient degree of content overlap between the two tests. For example, Algebra II was not previously assessed on TAKS, so there is no content overlap between TAKS and STAAR with regard to Algebra II. For this reason, no TAKS equivalent score information can be provided for STAAR Algebra II.

The TAKS Met standard equivalent score information on STAAR can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=2147507698>

40. Why are the performance standards on STAAR so much higher than they are on TAKS?

In TAKS, performance standards were set relative to the judgment of educators about the tested content and the expected relationship with other tests within the TAKS program. Although the performance standards on STAAR represent a significant increase in expectations from the performance standards on TAKS, they are, for the first time, set relative to other state and national assessments in addition to educator judgment about the tested content and expected relationship with other tests within the STAAR program. This allows TEA to be more confident that the performance standards are appropriate relative to our goal as a state to graduate students who are postsecondary ready. In addition, TEA will continue to monitor STAAR data relative to other state and national assessments and will review the performance standards in fall 2014 to ensure that the performance standards continue to provide meaningful information about student performance.

Questions about testing time for the assessments, use of STAAR scores in accountability, as well as many other topics are covered in the general STAAR Questions and Answers document at <http://www.txetests.com/FAQS/index.asp>.

Additional information about the STAAR program can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/staar/>.