

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

STAAR Alternate 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 Alternate assessments, there are three levels that describe student performance:

- Level III: Accomplished Academic Performance
- Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance
- Level I: Developing 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 Alternate 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/student.assessment/Staaralt-PerfLabelsPolicyDefs.pdf>.

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

Performance standards will be in place for students taking STAAR Alternate assessments in spring 2013. For students who took a STAAR Alternate assessment in spring 2012, scores and performance levels will be reported in January 2013. An adjusted cut score will apply to the spring 2012 scores. The final standards will be applied to students' scores in spring 2013 and beyond.

3. Will STAAR Alternate performance standards be phased in?

All programs within the STAAR assessment system will be implementing a process to phase in final performance standards. STAAR Alternate will also implement a process that will allow for an adjusted cut score for students who completed the assessment in 2011–2012. Beginning in 2012–2013, the final standard will apply to all students taking the STAAR Alternate assessments.

4. How were the adjusted cut scores determined?

STAAR Alternate cut scores are closely related to performance as defined by the STAAR Alternate scoring rubric. As such, the adjusted cut score is also directly related to the scoring rubric. The adjusted cut score relates to the highest score point a student who completes only Complexity Level 1 tasks can achieve.

5. Why is the phase-in plan for STAAR Alternate different than for the other assessment programs?

With the other assessments in the Texas assessment program, the goal of the phase-in plans is to allow school districts an appropriate amount of time to adjust instruction, provide additional professional development, increase teacher effectiveness, and close knowledge gaps in students' understanding of the content.

Although STAAR Alternate underwent the same process as the other assessments to develop more rigorous assessments and standards, student performance on STAAR Alternate does not indicate the same need to provide school districts additional time to adjust instruction and close knowledge

gaps. Specifically, the difference in the difficulty of the TAKS–Alt and STAAR Alternate, in terms of student performance, was smaller than what was seen in the general STAAR assessments. However, during the standard setting meetings, educator input indicated that it was necessary to implement changes to the STAAR Alternate administration guidelines resulting in the need for an adjusted cut score for the first year of the new STAAR Alternate (2011–2012). Therefore, the adjusted cut score for STAAR Alternate relates more to phasing in changes to administration guidelines than phasing in a final cut score.

The following administration guidelines are being implemented over the next two years.

2012–2013

- Combination of Complexity Level 1 and 2 tasks is allowable
- Three total assessment attempts allowed, including both complete and incomplete attempts
- ARD Committee may select complexity level of tasks

2013–2014

- ARD Committee required to select complexity level of tasks

The adjusted cut score that applies to 2011–2012 allows for students who completed only Complexity Level 1 tasks to reach proficiency. In 2012–2013, it will be necessary to complete at least one Complexity Level II or III task to reach proficiency.

STAAR Alternate Performance Standards: What performance standards were set and how were they set?

6. What are the STAAR Alternate performance standards?

Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance

The adjusted cut score is 48 out of 84 raw score points. The final cut score is 50 out of 84 raw score points.

Level III: Accomplished Academic Performance

The final cut score is 78 out of 84 raw score points.

7. Why is there an adjustment for Level II but not Level III?

Students taking STAAR Alternate will graduate under the Minimum High School Program. Therefore, unlike the general STAAR EOC program, STAAR Alternate does not have the requirement that students must achieve Level III performance in order to graduate under the Distinguished Achievement Program. Therefore, no adjusted cut score for the STAAR Alternate Level III standard is being implemented.

8. How were the performance standards for STAAR Alternate determined?

Performance standards for STAAR Alternate assessments are based on recommendations from standard-setting committees. These committees – convened in September 2012 – were composed of both K–12 educators and special education experts, such that the committees included experts in this student population as well as experts in the content areas. Committee members were provided with information about previous TAKS–Alt scores, the link between TAKS–Alt and STAAR Alternate, and information about the impact of their recommended cut scores on student performance for STAAR Alternate in 2011–2012. A brief description of the standard-setting process used for STAAR

Alternate assessments can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/STAAR-Alt-StandSettingProcess.pdf>

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

TEA conducted extensive research to support the standard-setting process for the STAAR program. Some studies focused on creating links between the STAAR Alternate assessments and the corresponding TAKS–Alt assessments. In addition, student profiles, or examples of how students might obtain various scores on STAAR Alternate, were created to provide a clear understanding of how score points on the STAAR Alternate scale aligned to the policy definitions and specific performance level descriptors.

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

After the performance standards are approved and implemented, the Commissioner of Education will continue to review the reasonableness of the STAAR Alternate performance standards on an annual basis. In addition, performance standards will be formally reviewed at least once every three years, as required by law. During standards review, TEA will examine impact and validity study results, including data from longitudinal studies and studies regarding the appropriate implementation of the assessment. In summer 2014, the performance standards will be reviewed and possibly adjusted based on additional research studies and student performance.

STAAR Alternate Performance Standards: What do they mean?

11. Why does STAAR Alternate use raw scores rather than scale scores?

Unlike the other programs in the Texas assessment program, scaling is not done for the STAAR Alternate assessments. All results are reported using the raw score scale, which is the number of items (or components of an assessment task) a student answers correctly. Because all STAAR Alternate assessments consist of four assessment tasks based on teacher observation, there is not the same type of variation across test forms as is typically observed in a multiple-choice assessment. Through training, teachers are able to consistently apply the STAAR Alternate rubric and maintain the integrity of the STAAR Alternate raw score scale across assessment tasks and administrations.

12. How do I interpret performance in each performance category?

STAAR Alternate performance is represented by three performance categories: Level I: Developing Academic Performance, Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance, and Level III: Accomplished Academic Performance. Full descriptions of the general expectation of performance for each level can be found in the policy definitions for STAAR Alternate at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/Staaralt-PerfLabelsPolicyDefs.pdf>. Full descriptions of the type of skills and knowledge represented by each category can be found in the specific performance level descriptors at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/special-ed/staaralt/standards/>.

STAAR Alternate Performance Standards: When will results be reported?

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

District and campus performance summaries were provided after the administration. *Confidential Student Reports* (CSRs) will be provided in January 2013.

14. What information will be reported to parents for the spring 2012 STAAR Alternate administration?

For STAAR Alternate, parents will receive a *Confidential Student Report (CSR)* for each STAAR Alternate assessment their child took. The CSR indicates a student's performance on each STAAR Alternate assessment; it includes performance by reporting category as well as overall test. The CSR also includes the performance level achieved and a unique access code for the student data portal, which can be found at <http://www.TexasAssessment.com/students>. The score report will show the student's score on each assessment he or she took in that academic year along with an indication as to whether the score reaches the criteria necessary to be labeled Satisfactory Academic Performance or Accomplished Academic Performance. For 2011-2012, the cut score used to classify a student's performance into Satisfactory or Accomplished Academic Performance will be the adjusted cut score. A more detailed description of the information included on the CSR can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/Staaralt-training-CSRbrochure-g3-8-eng.pdf>. Through the student data portal, parents and students can view test results across administrations and years.

15. Do STAAR Alternate students need to meet the same testing requirements as general education students?

STAAR Alternate students do not need to meet the same testing requirements or graduation requirements as general education students. Testing and graduation requirements for STAAR Alternate students are determined by the ARD committee.

STAAR Alternate Performance Standards: How does STAAR Alternate compare to TAKS–Alt?

16. How does the content assessed with STAAR Alternate compare to the content assessed with TAKS–Alt?

Both STAAR Alternate and TAKS–Alt closely align to the TEKS. The prerequisite skills chosen for the access point for each complexity level task are student expectations from the TEKS curriculum standards that directly align to the grade level Knowledge and Skills statements as organized on the [STAAR Alternate Curriculum Framework](#) documents. The alignment process for connecting the grade level standards to the prerequisite skills was the same for STAAR Alternate and TAKS–Alt. More complex prerequisite skills were targeted for a specific grade and subject than were used for TAKS–Alt whenever possible.

17. Was the standard-setting process for STAAR Alternate different from what was done for TAKS–Alt?

The standard-setting process for STAAR Alternate was very similar to the process that was used for TAKS–Alt. With TAKS–Alt, teachers were provided with information about how students could obtain various score points on the score scale and that information was used to establish neighborhoods within which cut scores could be identified. With STAAR Alternate, the same information was used to establish neighborhoods but, additionally, the link to TAKS–Alt was also used. Using external validity studies to help establish neighborhoods was an approach adopted for the entire STAAR assessment system. A summary of the steps used in the STAAR Alternate standard-setting process can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/STAAR-Alt-StandSettingProcess.pdf>.

18. How does the difficulty of the STAAR Alternate assessments compare to the difficulty of the TAKS–Alt assessments?

The STAAR program, overall, represents an increase in rigor (in terms of difficulty and cognitive complexity) when compared with TAKS. The increase in rigor applies to the STAAR Alternate assessment as well. Four categories of increased rigor were identified for STAAR Alternate: increased rigor of tasks, increased rigor of the test administration guidelines, increased rigor of the scoring rubric, and increased rigor of performance standards. A more detailed description of the ways rigor was increased for STAAR Alternate can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/STAAR-Alt-IncreasedRigor.pdf>.

19. Will TEA provide score information on STAAR Alternate that represents equivalent points to the TAKS–Alt passing standard?

TEA has provided equivalent cut score information for STAAR Alternate that represents where the TAKS–Alt cut score would fall on the STAAR Alternate scale. TEA used this information in Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) calculations for schools in 2012. A table showing the equivalent cut score information can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=2147507698>.

20. Why are performance standards on STAAR Alternate higher than they were on TAKS–Alt?

Texas House Bill 3 and Senate Bill 1031 established the foundation for a new assessment system. This legislation required increased rigor for both academic content standards and performance standards as well as assessments beyond what was evident in the TAKS program. Therefore, standard setting panelists set performance standards such that increased rigor would be met while maintaining reasonable expectations for students.

More information about changes to the state assessment program can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/hb3plan/HB3-ExecutiveSummary.pdf>.

Additional information about the STAAR Alternate program can be found at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/special-ed/staaralt/>.