

# STATE OF TEXAS ASSESSMENTS OF ACADEMIC READINESS (STAAR)

AN ISSUE BRIEF FROM LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD STAFF

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## OBJECTIVE

The state's current assessment system is the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), which tests students in grades 3 through 8 in math, reading, science, and social studies and includes 15 end-of-course assessments usually taken between grades 9 and 12.

## KEY FACTS

- ◆ Students entering grades 3 through 9 in the 2011–12 school year were the first students required to take the STAAR exam.
- ◆ To graduate, a student will be required to pass a minimum of 11 end-of-course exams and achieve a minimum cumulative score on all exams.

## BUDGETARY IMPACT

The Texas Education Agency was appropriated \$98.4 million in the 2012–13 biennium in General Revenue-related funds to implement the state assessment and accountability system, primarily through a contract with Pearson.

## STATUTORY REFERENCES

Texas Education Code, Chapter 39

Texas has operated a statewide program of academic assessments in public schools since 1979. The current system, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), enacted in 2007 was first implemented in the 2011–12 school year. The STAAR tests students in grades 3 through 8 in math, reading, science, and social studies and includes 15 end-of-course assessments usually taken between grades 9 and 12. The STAAR system is intended to be more rigorous than the previous assessment, in order to better measure a higher level of thinking and college readiness.

## STAAR BACKGROUND

Texas first instituted a statewide assessment in 1979 with the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS). The TABS tested minimum skills in reading, mathematics, and writing between 1981 and 1984. The TABS tests were replaced with the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) tests from 1985 to 1990, which also focused on a minimum skills set. Texas shifted focus from assessing minimum skills to academic skills with the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in 1993. The TAAS tested students on reading, writing, math, and social studies, and was part of the state's first accountability system. The accountability system rated school districts based on student performance on the TAAS and the annual student dropout rate. The accountability system was amended in 2004 to align with the transition to a new assessments program, the Texas Assessments of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), and to align with new federal performance standards set forth in the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Based on a desire to increase the rigor of state assessments and to better align assessment in high school grades with high school coursework, the state again transitioned to a new assessment system, the STAAR, as a result of actions of the Eightieth Legislature, 2007. The state first administered the new assessments to students entering grades 3 through 9 in the 2011–12 school year.

## EXAMS ADMINISTERED

The STAAR exams test students on reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8, on science in grades 5 and 8, on writing in grades 4 and 7, and on social studies in grade 8. In high school, students take end-of-course exams in the following courses: Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, English I Writing, English II Writing, English III Writing, English I Reading, English II Reading, English III Reading, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, World Geography, World History, and U.S. History. Fig. 1 shows the required STAAR exams by subject and grade level.

There are alternative versions of the STAAR to accommodate student groups with special needs including STAAR Spanish and STAAR L for English language learners and STAAR Modified and STAAR Alternate for students receiving special education services.

**FIG. 1  
STAAR EXAMS ADMINISTERED BY GRADE AND SUBJECT AREA**

Grade 3	Reading and Math				
Grade 4	Reading, Math, and Writing				
Grade 5	Reading, Math, Social Studies, and Science				
Grade 6	Reading and Math				
Grade 7	Reading, Math, and Writing				
Grade 8	Reading, Math, Social Studies, and Science				
High School	15 End-of-Course Assessments:				
	Algebra	English I Writing	English I Reading	Biology	World Geography
	Geometry	English II Writing	English II Reading	Chemistry	World History
	Algebra II	English III Writing	English III Reading	Physics	U.S. History

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency.

**PERFORMANCE AND PASSING STANDARDS**

Students who take the STAAR receive a score classified as Level I, Unsatisfactory Academic Performance; Level II, Satisfactory Academic Performance; or Level III, Advanced Academic Performance. In order to pass an exam, a student would need to achieve Level II.

Students in grades 5 and 8 must pass the STAAR reading and math exams in order to be promoted to the next grade. For a student to graduate from high school under the Minimum Graduation Plan, a minimum cumulative score must be met on all end-of-course STAAR exams and the student must pass 11 end-of-course exams. For a student to graduate under the Recommended High School Program or the Distinguished Achievement graduation program, the student must pass 15 end-of-course exams. The end-of-course STAAR exams are required to constitute 15 percent of a course’s final grade, although this requirement was waived by the Commissioner of Education for the 2011–12 school year.

If a student fails a STAAR exam, the student has the opportunity to retest for grades 5 and 8 reading and math and all end-of-course exams.

In June 2012, TEA released the results of the STAAR end-of-course exams from the 2011–12 school year. The typical ninth grader would have taken the following exams: English I Writing, English I Reading, Algebra I, Biology, and World Geography. In addition to these courses, there were exams given to students who are taking courses out of the normal sequence, or who are more advanced than the average ninth grader.

Of the courses typical of a ninth grader, passing rates are as follows: Biology (87 percent), Algebra I (83 percent), World Geography (81 percent), English I Reading (68 percent), and English I Writing (55 percent). Of the exams that had the highest passing rates, Biology and Algebra, only 37 percent of the questions on each exam needed to be answered correctly in order to receive a passing score for the 2011–12 school year.

The Level II passing standards are being phased in between the 2011–12 school year and the 2015–16 school year. If the final passing standards had been in place for the 2011–12 school year, the passing rates for the courses typical of a ninth grader would have been: Biology (41 percent), Algebra I (39 percent), World Geography (40 percent), English I Reading (46 percent), and English I Writing (34 percent).

Passing standards for STAAR exams in grades 3 through 8 will be set in the fall of 2012.

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